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Edw^d Cunningham

LUCRETIA

OR

THE CHILDREN OF NIGHT.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RIENZI."

ETC. ETC.

"DOVE IL SOL TACE."

Dante: l'Infern. Cant. 1, l. 60.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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is published by DUNCKER & HUMBLLOT, BERLIN.]*

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1846.

PART THE SECOND

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XII.

SUDDEN CELEBRITY AND PATIENT HOPE.

PERCIVAL was unusually gloomy and abstracted in his way to town that day, though Varney was his companion, and in the full play of those animal spirits which he owed to his unrivalled physical organization and the obtuseness of his conscience. Seeing, at length, that his gaiety did not communicate itself to Percival, he paused and looked at him suspiciously. A falling leaf startles the steed, and a shadow the guilty man.

“You are sad, Percival?” he said, inquiringly.

“What has disturbed you?”

“It is nothing—or, at least, would seem nothing

to you," answered Percival, with an effort to smile, "for I have heard you laugh at the doctrine of presentiments. We sailors are more superstitious."

"What presentiment can you possibly entertain?" asked Varney, more anxiously than Percival could have anticipated.

"Presentiments are not so easily defined, Varney. But, in truth, poor Helen has infected me. Have you not remarked, that, gay as she habitually is, some shadow comes over her so suddenly, that one cannot trace the cause? And to-day she has been talking as I never heard but one talk before, and that was a poor fellow-midshipman of mine, who seemed the very picture of health, and who was persuaded he should die of consumption. We used to laugh at him; but, three months after his return home, I saw in the papers that he did die, and of that disease."

Varney mused. It might be well to foster the idea thus started; would it not be prudent, also, now to mention Helen's insurances on her life; it would come in so naturally—it would prevent the suspicious appearance of too close a secrecy hereafter.

“My dear Percival,” said he, after a short pause, “what you say does not surprise me. Helen herself has confided to me those strange forebodings of hers. Like you I see no cause for them, though it would be false kindness to conceal from you that I have heard Madame Dalibard say that her mother was, when about her age, threatened with consumptive symptoms,—but she lived many years afterwards. Nay, nay, rally yourself; Helen’s appearance, despite the extreme purity of her complexion, is not that of one threatened by the terrible malady of our climate. The young are often haunted with the idea of early death. As we grow older, that thought is less cherished; in youth it is a sort of luxury. To this mournful idea, (which you see, you have remarked as well as I,) we must attribute not only Helen’s romantic presentiments, but a generosity of forethought, which I cannot deny myself the pleasure of communicating to you, though her delicacy would be shocked at my indiscretion. You know how helpless her aunt is. Well, Helen, who is entitled, when of age, to a moderate competence, has persuaded me to insure her life, and accept a trust to hold the monies (if

ever unhappily due) for the benefit of my mother-in-law, so that Madame Dalibard may not be left destitute, if her niece die before she is twenty-one. How like Helen!—is it not?”

Percival was too overcome to answer.

Varney resumed—“I entreat you not to mention this to Helen—it would offend her modesty to have the secret of her good deeds thus betrayed by one to whom alone she confided them. I could not resist her entreaties; though, *entre-nous*, it cripples me not a little to advance for her the necessary sums for the premiums. Apropos, this brings me to a point on which I feel, as the vulgar idiom goes, ‘very awkward,’—as I always do in these confounded money matters. But you were good enough to ask me to paint you a couple of pictures for Laughton. Now, if you could let me have some portion of the sum, whatever it be (for I don’t price my painting to you), it would very much oblige me.”

Percival turned away his face as he wrung Varney’s hand, and muttered, with a choked voice, “Let me have my share in Helen’s divine forethought. Good heavens! she, so young, to look thus beyond the grave, always for others—for others!”

Callous as the wretch was, Percival's emotion and his proposal struck Varney with a sentiment like compunction. He had designed to appropriate the lover's gold, as it was now offered; but that Percival himself should propose it, blind to the grave, to which that gold paved the way, was a horror not counted in those to which his fell cupidity and his goading apprehensions had familiarized his conscience.

"No," he said, with one of those wayward scruples to which the blackest criminals are sometimes susceptible—"no. I have promised Helen to regard this as a loan to her, which she is to repay me when of age. What you may advance me is for the pictures. I have a right to do as I please with what is bought by my own labour. And the subjects of the pictures—what shall they be?"

"For one picture try and recall Helen's aspect and attitude when you came to us in the garden, and entitle your subject—'The Foreboding.'"

"Hem!" said Varney, hesitatingly. "And the other subject?"

"Wait for that, till the joy-bells at Laughton have welcomed a bride, and then—and then, Var-

ney," added Percival, with something of his natural joyous smile, "you must take the expression as you find it. Once under my care, and, please Heaven, the one picture shall laughingly upbraid the other!"

As this was said, the cabriolet stopped at Percival's door. Varney dined with him that day; and if the conversation flagged, it did not revert to the subject which had so darkened the bright spirits of the host, and so tried the hypocrisy of the guest. When Varney left, which he did as soon as the dinner was concluded, Percival silently put a cheque into his hands, to a greater amount than Varney had anticipated even from his generosity.

"This is for four pictures, not two," he said, shaking his head; and then, with his characteristic conceit, he added—"Well, some years hence, the world shall not call them overpaid. Adieu, my Medici; a dozen such men, and Art would revive in England."

When he was left alone, Percival sat down, and, leaning his face on both hands, gave way to the gloom which his native manliness, and the delicacy that belongs to true affection, had made

him struggle not to indulge in the presence of another. Never had he so loved Helen as in that hour; never had he so intimately and intensely felt her matchless worth. The image of her unselfish, quiet, melancholy consideration for that austere, uncaressing, unsympathizing relation, under whose shade her young heart must have withered, seemed to him filled with a celestial pathos. And he almost hated Varney that the cynic painter could have talked of it with that business-like phlegm. The evening deepened; the tranquil street grew still; the air seemed close; the solitude oppressed him; he rose abruptly, seized his hat, and went forth, slowly, and still with a heavy heart.

As he entered Piccadilly, on the broad step of that house successively inhabited by the Duke of Queensbury and Lord Hertford, and now divided into apartments for such as can pay per room the rent of a moderate house,—on the step of that mansion, up which so many footsteps light with wanton pleasure have gaily trod, Percival's eye fell upon a wretched, squalid, ragged object, doubled up, as it were, in that last despondency which has ceased to beg, that has no care to steal, that has

no wish to live. Percival halted, and touched the outcast.

“What is the matter, my poor fellow? Take care—the policeman will not suffer you to rest here. Come, cheer up, I say! There is something to find you a better lodging!”

The silver fell unheeded on the stones. The thing of rags did not even raise its head, but a low broken voice, muttered—

“It be too late now—let ’em take me to prison—let ’em send me ’cross the sea to Buttany—let ’em hang me, if they please. I be’s good for nothin’ now—nothin’!”

Altered as the voice was, it struck Percival as familiar. He looked down and caught a view of the drooping face.

“Up, man, up!” he said, cheerily; “see, Providence sends you an old friend in need, to teach you never to despair again.”

The hearty accent, more than the words, touched and aroused the poor creature. He rose mechanically, and a sickly grateful smile passed over his wasted features, as he recognised St. John.

“Come! how is this? I have always understood

that to keep a crossing was a flourishing trade now-a-days."

"I 'as no crossin'. I 'as sold her!" groaned Beck. "I be's good for nothin' now, but to cadge about the streets, and steal, and filch, and hang like the rest on us! Thank you, kindly, sir," (and Beck pulled his forelock,) "but, please your 'onor, I vould rather make an ind on it!"

"Pooh, pooh! didn't I tell you when you wanted a friend to come to me? Why did you doubt me, foolish fellow? Pick up those shillings—get a bed and a supper. Come and see me to-morrow, at nine o'clock; you know where—the same house in Curzon Street; you shall tell me then your whole story, and it shall go hard but I'll buy you another crossing, or get you something just as good."

Poor Beck swayed a moment or two on his slender legs, like a drunken man, and then suddenly falling on his knees, he kissed the hem of his benefactor's garment, and fairly wept. Those tears relieved him—they seemed to wash the drought of despair from his heart.

"Hush, hush! or we shall have a crowd round us. You wont forget, my poor friend, No. —, Curzon Street—nine to-morrow. Make haste,

now, and get food and rest—you look, indeed, as if you wanted them. Ah! would to Heaven all the poverty in this huge city stood here in thy person, and we could aid it as easily as I can thee!”

Percival had moved on as he said those last words, and, looking back, he had the satisfaction to see that Beck was slowly crawling after him, and had escaped the grim question of a very portly policeman, who had no doubt expressed a natural indignation at the audacity of so ragged a skeleton not keeping itself respectably at home in its churchyard.

Entering one of the clubs in St. James's Street, Percival found a small knot of politicians in eager conversation respecting a new book which had been published but a day or two before, but which had already seized the public attention with that strong grasp which constitutes always an era in an author's life, sometimes an epoch in a nation's literature. The newspapers were full of extracts from the work—the gossips of conjecture as to the authorship. We need scarcely say that a book which makes this kind of sensation, must hit some popular feeling of the hour, supply some popular want. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, there-

fore, its character is political: it was so in the present instance. It may be remembered that that year Parliament sate during great part of the month of October, that it was the year in which the Reform Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, and that public feeling in our time had never been so keenly excited. This work appeared during the short interval between the rejection of the Bill and the prorogation of Parliament.* And what made it more remarkable, was that while stamped with the passion of the time, there was a weight of calm and stern reasoning, embodied in its vigorous periods, which gave to the arguments of the advocate something of the impartiality of the judge. Unusually abstracted and unsocial, for, despite his youth and that peculiar bashfulness before noticed, he was generally alive enough to all that passed around him, Percival paid little attention to the comments that circulated round the easy chairs in his vicinity, till a subordinate in the administration, with whom he was slightly acquainted, pushed a small volume towards him, and said :

* Parliament was prorogued October 20th; the bill rejected by the Lords, October 8th.

"You have seen this, of course, St. John? Ten to one you do not guess the author. It is certainly not B——m, though the Lord Chancellor has energy enough for anything. R—— says it has a touch of S——r."

"Could M——y have written it?" asked a young member of Parliament, timidly.

"M——y!—very like his matchless style, to be sure! You can have read very little of M——y, I should think," said the subordinate, with the true sneer of an official and a critic.

The young member could have slunk into a nutshell.

Percival, with very languid interest, glanced over the volume. But despite his mood, and his moderate affection for political writings, the passage he opened upon struck and seized him unawares. Though the sneer of the official was just, and the style was not comparable to M——y's, (whose is?) still the steady rush of strong words, strong with strong thoughts—heaped massively together—showed the ease of genius and the gravity of thought:—the absence of all effeminate glitter—the iron grapple with the pith and substance of the argument opposed, seemed familiar to Percival.

He thought he heard the deep bass of John Ardworth's earnest voice, when some truth roused his advocacy, or some falsehood provoked his wrath. He put down the book, bewildered. Could it be the obscure briefless lawyer in Gray's Inn, (that very morning the object of his young pity,) who was thus lifted into fame? He smiled at his own credulity. But he listened with more attention to the enthusiastic praises that circled round, and the various guesses which accompanied them. Soon, however, his former gloom returned—the Babel began to chafe and weary him. He rose and went forth again into the air. He strolled on without purpose, but mechanically, into the street where he had first seen Helen. He paused a few moments under the colonnade which faced Beck's old deserted crossing. His pause attracted the notice of one of the unhappy beings whom we suffer to pollute our streets, and rot in our hospitals. She approached and spoke to him—to *him* whose heart was so full of Helen! He shuddered, and strode on. At length, he paused before the twin towers of Westminster Abbey, on which the moon rested in solemn splendour; and in that space, one man only

shared his solitude. A figure with folded arms leant against the iron rails, near the statue of Canning, and his gaze comprehended in one view, the walls of the Parliament, in which all passions wage their war, and the glorious Abbey, which gives a Walhalla to the great. The utter stillness of the figure, so in unison with the stillness of the scene, had upon Percival more effect than would have been produced by the most clamorous crowd. He looked round curiously, as he passed, and uttered an exclamation, as he recognised John Ardworth.

“You, Percival!” said Ardworth—“a strange meeting-place at this hour! What can bring you hither?”

“Only whim, I fear—and you?” as Percival linked his arm into Ardworth’s.

“Twenty years hence I will tell you what brought me here!” answered Ardworth, moving slowly back towards Whitehall.

“If we are alive then!”

“We live till our destinies below are fulfilled; till our uses have passed from us in this sphere, and rise to benefit another. For the soul is as a sun, but with this noble distinction, the sun is confined in its career—day after day, it visits the same

lands, gilds the same planets, or rather, as the astronomers hold, stands the motionless centre of moving worlds. But the soul, when it sinks into seeming darkness and the deep, rises to new destinies, fresh regions unvisited before. What we call Eternity, may be but an endless series of those transitions, which men call *deaths*, abandonments of home after home, ever to fairer scenes and loftier heights. Age after age, the spirit, that glorious Nomad, may shift its tent, fated not to rest in the dull Elysium of the Heathen, but carrying with it evermore its elements,—Activity and Desire. Why should the soul ever repose? God, its Principle, reposes never. While we speak, new worlds are sparkling forth—suns are throwing off their nebulæ—nebulæ are hardening into worlds. The Almighty proves his existence by creating. Think you that Plato is at rest, and Shakspeare only basking on a sun-cloud? Labour is the very essence of spirit as of divinity: labour is the purgatory of the erring; it may become the hell of the wicked, but labour is not less the heaven of the good!”

Ardworth spoke with unusual earnestness and passion; and his idea of the future was emblem-

atic of his own active nature : for each of us is wisely left to shape out, amidst the impenetrable mists, his own ideal of the Hereafter. The warrior child of the biting north placed his Hela amid snows, and his Himmel in the banquets of victorious war ; the son of the East, parched by relentless summer—his hell amidst fire, and his elysium by cooling streams ; the weary peasant sighs through life for rest, and rest awaits his vision beyond the grave ; the workman of genius—ever ardent, ever young—honours toil as the glorious development of being—and springs refreshed over the abyss of the grave—to follow, from star to star, the progress that seems to him at once the supreme felicity and the necessary law. So be it with the fantasy of each ! Wisdom that is infallible, and love that never sleeps, watch over the darkness—and bid darkness be, that we may dream !

“ Alas ! ” said the young listener—“ what reproof do you not convey to those, like me, who, devoid of the power which gives results to every toil, have little left to them in life, but to idle life away. All have not the gift to write, or harangue, or speculate, or——”

“Friend,” interrupted Ardworth, bluntly; “do not belie yourself. There lives not a man on earth—out of a lunatic asylum—who has not in him the power to do good. What can writers, haranguers, or speculators do more than that? Have you ever entered a cottage—ever travelled in a coach—ever talked with a peasant in the field, or loitered with a mechanic at the loom, and not found that each of those men had a talent you had not, knew some things you knew not? The most useless creature that ever yawned at a club, or counted the vermin on his rags, under the suns of Calabria, has no excuse for want of intellect. What men want is, not talent, it is purpose ;—in other words, not the power to achieve, but the will to labour. You, Percival Saint John—you affect to despond, lest you should not have your uses—you, with that fresh warm heart—you, with that pure enthusiasm for what is fresh and good—you, who can even admire a thing like Varney, because, through the tawdry man, you recognise art and skill, even though wasted in spoiling canvas—you, who have only to live as you feel, in order to diffuse blessings all around you,—fie, foolish boy!—you will own your error

when I tell you why I come from my rooms at Gray's Inn to see the walls in which Hampden, a plain country squire like you, shook with plain words the tyranny of eight hundred years."

"Ardworth, I will not wait your time to tell me what took you yonder. I have penetrated a secret that you, not kindly, kept from me. This morning you rose and found yourself famous; this evening you have come to gaze upon the scene of the career to which that fame will more rapidly conduct you——"

"And upon the tomb which the proudest ambition I can form on earth must content itself to win! A poor conclusion, if all ended here!"

"I am right, however," said Percival, with boyish pleasure. "It is you whose praises have just filled my ears. You, dear—dear Ardworth! How rejoiced I am!"

Ardworth pressed heartily the hand extended to him: "I should have trusted you with my secret to-morrow, Percival; as it is, keep it for the present. A craving of my nature has been satisfied, a grief has found distraction; as for the rest, any child who throws a stone into the water with all his force can make a splash; but he would

be a fool, indeed, if he supposed that the splash was a sign that he had turned a stream."

Here Ardworth ceased abruptly—and Percival, engrossed by a bright idea, which had suddenly occurred to him, exclaimed—

"Ardworth—your desire, your ambition, is to enter parliament; there must be a dissolution shortly—the success of your book will render you acceptable to many a popular constituency. All you can want is a sum for the necessary expenses. Borrow that sum from me—repay me when you are in the cabinet, or attorney-general. It shall be so!"

A look so bright, that even by that dull lamplight, the glow of the cheek, the brilliancy of the eye were visible—flashed over Ardworth's face. He felt at that moment what ambitious man must feel when the object he has seen dimly and afar—is placed within his grasp; but his reason was proof even against that strong temptation.

He passed his arm round the boy's slender waist, and drew him to his heart, with grateful affection, as he replied.

"And what, if now in parliament, giving up my

career—with no regular means of subsistence—what could I be, but a venal adventurer? Place would become so vitally necessary to me, that I should feed but a dangerous war between my conscience and my wants. In chasing *Fame*, the shadow, I should lose the substance, *Independence*,—why, that very thought would paralyse my tongue. No, no—my generous friend. As labour is the arch elevator of man, so patience is the essence of labour. First let me build the foundation, I may then calculate the height of my tower. First let me be independent of the great—I will then be the champion of the lowly. Hold!—tempt me no more—do not lure me to the loss of self-esteem! And now Percival,” resumed Ardworth, in the tone of one who wishes to plunge into some utterly new current of thought—“let us forget for awhile these solemn aspirations, and be frolicsome and human. ‘*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*’ ‘*Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo.*’ What say you, to a cigar?”

Percival stared. He was not yet familiarized to the eccentric whims of his friend!

“Hot negus and a cigar!” repeated Ardworth, while a smile, full of drollery, played round the

corners of his lips, and twinkled in his deep-set eyes.

“Are you serious?”

“Not serious—I have been serious enough,” (and Ardworth sighed,) “for the last three weeks. Who goes to Corinth to be sage, or to the Cider Cellar to be serious?”

“I subscribe, then, to the negus and cigar,” said Percival, smiling; and he had no cause to repent his compliance, as he accompanied Ardworth to one of the resorts favoured by that strange person in his rare hours of relaxation.

For, seated at his favourite table, which happened, luckily, to be vacant, with his head thrown carelessly back, and his negus steaming before him, John Ardworth continued to pour forth, till the clock struck three, jest upon jest—pun upon pun—broad drollery upon broad drollery, without flagging, without intermission—so varied, so copious, so ready, so irresistible, that Percival was transported out of all his melancholy, in enjoying, for the first time in his life, the exuberant gaiety of a grave mind once set free—all its intellect sparkling into wit—all its passion rushing into humour. And this was the man he had

pitied!—supposed to have no sunny side to his life! How much greater had been his compassion and his wonder, if he could have known all that had passed, within the last few weeks, through that gloomy, yet silent breast, which, by the very breadth of its mirth, showed what must be the depth of its sadness!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOSS OF THE CROSSING.

DESPITE the lateness of the hour before he got to rest, Percival had already breakfasted, when his valet informed him, with raised supercilious eyebrows, that "an uncommon ragged sort of a person insisted that he had been told to call." Though Beck had been at the house before, and the valet had admitted him—so much thinner, so much more ragged was he now, that the trim servant—no close observer of such folks—did not recognise him. However, at Percival's order, too well bred to show surprise, he ushered Beck up with much civility; and St. John was painfully struck with the ravages a few weeks had made upon the sweeper's countenance. The

lines were so deeply ploughed—the dry hair looked so thin, and was so sown with gray, that Beck might have beat all Farren's skill in the part of an old man.

The poor Sweeper's tale, extricated from its peculiar phraseology, was simple enough, and soon told:—He had returned home at night to find his hoards stolen, and the labour of his life overthrown. How he passed that night he did not very well remember. We may well suppose that the little reason he possessed was well nigh bereft from him. No suspicion of the exact thief crossed his perturbed mind. Bad as Grabman's character might be, he held a respectable position compared with the other lodgers in the house. Bill, the cracksman, naturally, and by vocation, suggested the hand that had despoiled him;—how hope for redress, or extort surrender, from such a quarter? Mechanically, however, when the hour arrived to return to his day's task, he stole down the stairs, and lo, at the very door of the house, Bill's children were at play, and in the hand of the eldest he recognised what he called his "curril."

"Your curril?" interrupted St. John.

“Yes, curril—vot the little uns bite, afore they gets their teethin’.”

St. John smiled, and supposing that Beck had some time or other been puerile enough to purchase such a bauble, nodded to him to continue ;—To seize upon the urchin, and, in spite of kicks, bites, shrieks, or scratches, repossess himself of his treasure, was the feat of a moment. The brat’s clamour drew out the father—and to him Beck, (pocketing the coral, that its golden bells might not attract the more experienced eye, and influence the more formidable greediness, of the paternal thief,) loudly, and at first fearlessly, appealed. Him he charged, and accused, and threatened with all vengeance, human and Divine. Then changing his tone, he implored—he wept—he knelt. As soon as the startled cracksman recovered his astonishment at such audacity, and comprehended the nature of the charge against himself and his family, he felt the more indignant from a strange and unfamiliar consciousness of innocence. Seizing Beck by the nape of the neck, with a dexterous application of hand and foot, he sent him spinning into the kennel.

“Go to Jericho, mud-scraper!” cried Bill, in a voice of thunder—“and if ever thou sayst such a vopper agin—’sparaging the characters of them ere motherless babes—I’ll seal thee up in a ’tato sack, and sell thee for fiv’pence to No. 7, the great body-snatcher. Take care how I ever sets eyes agin on thy h-ugly mug!”

With that Bill clapped-to the door, and Beck, frightened out of his wits, crawled from the kennel, and, bruised and smarting, crept to his crossing. But he was unable to discharge his duties that day; his ill-fed miserable frame was too weak for the stroke he had received. Long before dusk, he sneaked away, and, dreading to return to his lodging; lest, since nothing now was left worth robbing but his carcass, Bill might keep his word, and sell *that* to the body-snatcher, he took refuge under the only roof where he felt he could sleep in safety.

And here we must pause to explain. In our first introduction of Beck, we contented ourselves with implying to the ingenious and practised reader, that his heart might still be large enough

to hold something besides his crossing. Now, in one of the small alleys that have their vent in the great stream of Fleet-street, there dwelt an old widow-woman, who eked out her existence by charing — an industrious, drudging creature, whose sole occupation since her husband, the journeyman-bricklayer, fell from a scaffold, and, breaking his neck, left her happily childless, as well as penniless—had been scrubbing stone-floors, and cleaning out dingy houses when about to be let,—charing, in a word. And in this vocation had she kept body and soul together, till a bad rheumatism and old age had put an end to her utilities, and entitled her to the receipt of two shillings weekly from parochial munificence. Between this old woman and Beck there was a mysterious tie—so mysterious, that he did not well comprehend it himself. Sometimes he called her “mammy”—sometimes “the h-old crittur.” But certain it is, that to her he was indebted for that name which he bore, to the puzzlement of St. Giles’s.

Becky Carruthers was the name of the old woman; but Becky was one of those good crea-

tures who are always called by their Christian names, and never rise into the importance of the surname, and the dignity of "Mistress;"—lopping off the last syllable of the familiar appellation, the outcast christened himself "Beck."

"And," said St. John, who in the course of question and answer had got thus far into the marrow of the sweeper's narrative, "is not this good woman really your mother?"

"Mother!" echoed Beck, with disdain; "no, I 'as a gritter mother nor she. Sint Poll's is my mother. But the h-old crittur tuk care on me."

"I really don't understand you. Saint Paul's is your mother!—How?"

Beck shook his head mysteriously, and without answering the question, resumed the tale, which we must thus paraphrastically continue to deliver.

When he was a little more than six years old, Beck began to earn his own livelihood, by running errands, holding horses, scraping together pence and half-pence. Betimes, his passion for saving began; at first with a good and unselfish motive, that of surprising 'mammy' at the week's end. But when 'mammy,' who then gained enough for her-

self, patted his head and called him good boy, and bade him save for his own uses, and told him what a great thing it would be if he could lay by a pretty penny against he was a man, he turned miser on his own account; and the miserable luxury grew upon him. At last, by the permission of the police inspector, strengthened by that of the owner of the contiguous house, he made his great step in life, and succeeded a deceased negro in the dignity and emoluments of the memorable crossing. From that hour he felt himself fulfilling his proper destiny; but poor Becky, alas, had already fallen into the sere and yellow leaf! with her decline, her good qualities were impaired. She took to drinking—not to positive intoxication, but to making herself ‘comfortable;’—and, to satisfy her craving, Beck, waking betimes one morning, saw her emptying his pockets. Then he resolved, quietly and without upbraiding her, to remove to a safer lodging. To save had become the imperative necessity of his existence. But to do him justice, Beck had a glimmering sense of what was due to the ‘h-old crittur.’ Every Saturday evening, he called at her house, and deposited with her a certain sum, not

large even in proportion to his earnings, but which seemed to the poor ignorant miser, who grudged every farthing to himself, an enormous deduction from his total, and a sum sufficient for every possible want of humankind even to satiety. And now, in returning, despoiled of all, save the few pence he had collected that day, it is but fair to him to add that not his least bitter pang was in the remembrance that this was the only Saturday on which, for the first time, the weekly stipend would fail.

But so ill and so wretched did he look when he reached her little room, that 'mammy' forgot all thought of herself; and when he had told his tale, so kind was her comforting, so unselfish her sympathy, that his heart smote him for his old parsimony, for his hard resentment at her single act of peculation;—had not she the right to all he made? But remorse and grief alike soon vanished in the fever that now seized him; for several days he was insensible; and when he recovered sufficiently to be aware of what was around him, he saw the widow seated beside him, within four bare walls,—everything, except the bed he slept

on, had been sold to support him in his illness. As soon as he could totter forth, Beck hastened to his crossing—alas, it was preoccupied ! His absence had led to ambitious usurpation. A one-legged, sturdy sailor had mounted his throne, and wielded his sceptre. The decorum of the street forbade altercation to the contending parties ; but the sailor referred discussion to a meeting at a flash house in the Rookery that evening. There, a jury was appointed, and the case opened. By the conventional laws that regulate this useful community, Beck was still in his rights : his reappearance sufficed to restore his claims, and an appeal to the policeman would no doubt re-establish his authority. But Beck was still so ill and so feeble, that he had a melancholy persuasion that he could not suitably perform the duties of his office ; and when the sailor, not a bad fellow on the whole, offered to pay down on the nail what really seemed a very liberal sum for Beck's peaceful surrender of his rights, the poor wretch thought of the bare walls at his 'mammy's,' of the long, dreary interval that must elapse, even if able to work, before the furniture pawned could be

redeemed by the daily profits of his post, and, with a groan, he held out his hand, and concluded the bargain.

Creeping home to the ‘h-old crittur,’ he threw the purchase money into her lap; then, broken-hearted, and in despair, he slunk forth again in a sort of vague, dreamy hope, that the law, which abhors vagabonds, would seize and finish him.

When this tale was done, Percival did not neglect the gentle task of admonition, which the poor Sweeper’s softened heart and dull remorse made the easier. He pointed out, in soft tones, how the avarice he had indulged had been, perhaps, mercifully chastised; and drew no ineloquent picture of the vicious miseries of the confirmed miser. Beck listened humbly and respectfully, though so little did he understand of mercy, and Providence, and vice, that the diviner part of the homily was quite lost on him. However, he confessed penitently that ‘the mattress had made him vorse nor a beast to the ‘h-old crittur;’ and that he was ‘cured of saving to the end of his days.’

“And now,” said Percival, “as you really seem

not strong enough to bear this out-of-door work, (the winter coming on, too) what say you to entering into my service? I want some help in my stables. The work is easy enough; and you are used to horses, you know, in a sort of a way."

Beck hesitated, and looked a moment undecided. At last, he said, "Please your 'onor, if I beant strong enough for the crossin', I'se afeard I'm too h-ailing to sarve you. And wouldn't I be vorse nor a wiper, to take your vages, and not vork for 'em h-as I h-ought?"

"Pooh, we'll soon make you strong, my man. Take my advice—don't let your head run on the crossing. That kind of industry exposes you to bad company and bad thoughts."

"That's vot it is, sir," said Beck, assentingly, laying his dexter forefinger on his sinister palm.

"Well! you are in my service, then. Go down stairs now, and get your breakfast;—by and by, you shall show me your 'mammy's' house, and we'll see what can be done for her."

Beck pressed his hands to his eyes, trying

hard not to cry ; but it was too much for him ; and as the valet, who appeared to Percival's summons, led him down the stairs, his sobs were heard from attic to basement.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEWS FROM GRABMAN.

THAT day, opening thus auspiciously to Beck, was memorable also to other and more prominent persons in this history.

Early in the forenoon a parcel was brought to Madame Dalibard, which contained Ardworth's already famous book, a goodly assortment of extracts from the newspapers thereon, and the following letter from the young author :

“You will see, by the accompanying packet, that your counsels have had weight with me. I have turned aside in my slow legitimate career. I have, as you desired, made “men talk of me.” What solid benefit I may reap from this, I know not. I shall not openly avow the book. Such notoriety

cannot help me at the bar. But, *liberavi animam meam*—excuse my pedantry—I have let my soul free for a moment—I am now catching it back, to put bit and saddle on again. I will not tell you how you have disturbed me—how you have stung me into this premature rush amidst the crowd—how, after robbing me of name and father, you have driven me to this experiment with my own mind, to see if I was deceived, when I groaned to myself, ‘The Public shall give you a name, and Fame shall be your mother.’ I am satisfied with the experiment. I know better now what is in me : And I have regained my peace of mind. If, in the success of this hasty work, there be that which will gratify the interest you so kindly take in me, deem that success your own : I owe it to you—to your revelations—to your admonitions. I wait patiently your own time for further disclosures ; till then, the wheel must work on, and the grist be ground. Kind and generous friend, till now I would not wound you by returning the sum you sent me—nay, more, I knew I should please you by devoting part of it to the risk of giving this essay to the world, and so making its

good fortune doubly your own work. Now, when the publisher smiles, and the shopmen bow, and I am acknowledged to have a bank in my brains, —*now*, you cannot be offended to receive it back. Adieu. When my mind is in train again, and I feel my step firm on the old dull road, I will come to see you. Till then, yours — by what name? Open the ‘Biographical Dictionary,’ at hazard, and send me one.”

“Gray’s Inn.”

Not at the noble thoughts, and the deep sympathy with mankind, that glowed through that work, over which Lucretia now tremulously hurried, did she feel delight. All that she recognised or desired to recognise, were those evidences of that kind of intellect which wins its way through the world, and which, strong and unmistakeable, rose up in every page of that vigorous logic and commanding style. The book was soon dropped thus read: the newspaper extracts pleased even more.

“This,” she said, audibly, in the freedom of her solitude — “this is the son I asked for — a

son in whom I can rise—in whom I can exchange the sense of crushing infamy for the old delicious ecstasy of pride! For this son can I do too much? No; In what I may do for him, methinks there will be no remorse! And he calls his success mine—mine!” Her nostrils dilated, and her front rose erect.

In the midst of this exultation, Varney found her, and before he could communicate the business which had brought him, he had to listen, which he did with the secret gnawing envy that every other man’s success occasioned him, to her haughty self-felicitations.

He could not resist saying, with a sneer, when she paused, as if to ask his sympathy:

“All this is very fine, *belle mère*; and yet I should hardly have thought that coarse-featured, uncouth limb of the law, who seldom moves without upsetting a chair—never laughs but the panes rattle in the window—I should hardly have thought *him* the precise person to gratify your pride, or answer the family ideal of a gentleman and a St. John.”

“Gabriel,” said Lucretia, sternly—“you have

a biting tongue, and it is folly in me to resent those privileges which our fearful connexion gives you. But—this raillery——”

“Come, come, I was wrong—forgive it!” interrupted Varney, who, dreading nothing else, dreaded much the rebuke of his grim step-mother.

“It is forgiven,” said Lucretia, coldly, and with a slight waive of her hand; then she added, with composure:

“Long since—even while heiress of Laughton—I parted with mere pride in the hollow seemings of distinction. Had I not, should I have stooped to William Mainwaring? What I then respected, amidst all the degradations I have known, I respect still; talent, ambition, intellect and will. Do you think I would exchange these in a son of mine, for the mere graces which a dancing-master can sell him? Fear not! Let us give but wealth to that intellect, and the world will see no clumsiness in the movements that march to its high places, and hear no discord in the laugh that triumphs over fools! But you have some news to communicate, or some proposal to suggest.”

"I have both," said Varney. "In the first place, I have a letter from Grabman!"

Lucretia's eyes sparkled, and she snatched eagerly at the letter her son-in-law drew forth.

"Liverpool, October, 1831.

"Jason,—I think I am on the road to success. Having first possessed myself of the fact, commemorated in the parish register, of the birth and baptism of Alfred Braddell's son, for we must proceed regularly in these matters, I next set my wits to work, to trace that son's exodus from the paternal mansion. I have hunted up an old woman-servant, Jane Prior, who lived with the Braddells. She now thrives as a laundress; she is a rank puritan, and starches for the godly. She was at first very wary and reserved in her communications, but by siding with her prejudices and humours, and by the intercession of the Rev. Mr. Graves, (of her own persuasion,) I have got her to open her lips. It seems that these Braddells lived very unhappily—the husband, a pious dissenter, had married a lady who turned out of a very different practice and belief. Jane

Prior pitied her master, and detested her mistress. Some circumstances in the conduct of Mrs. Braddell made the husband, who was then in his last illness, resolve, from a point of conscience, to save his child from what he deemed the contamination of her precepts and example. Mrs. Braddell was absent from Liverpool, on a visit, which was thought very unfeeling by the husband's friends; during this time Braddell was visited constantly by a gentleman (Mr. Ardworth), who differed from him greatly in some things, and seemed one of the carnal; but with whom agreement in politics (for they were both great politicians and republicans) seems to have established a link. One evening, when Mr. Ardworth was in the house, Jane Prior, who was the only maid-servant, (for they kept but two, and one had been just discharged,) had been sent out to the apothecary's. On her return, Jane Prior going into the nursery, missed the infant; she thought it was with her master, but coming into his room, Mr. Braddell told her to shut the door, informed her that he had entrusted the boy to Mr. Ardworth, to be brought up in a righteous

and pious manner, and implored and commanded her to keep this a secret from his wife, whom he was resolved, indeed, if he lived, not to receive back into his house. Braddell, however, did not survive more than two days this event. On his death, Mrs. Braddell returned, but circumstances connected with the symptoms of his malady, and a strong impression which haunted himself, and with which he had infected Jane Prior, that he had been poisoned, led to a posthumous examination of his remains. No trace of poison was however discovered, and suspicions that had been directed against his wife, could not be substantiated by law; still, she was regarded in so unfavourable a light by all who had known them both, she met with such little kindness or sympathy in her widowhood, and had been so openly denounced by Jane Prior, that it is not to be wondered at that she left the place as soon as possible. The house, indeed, was taken from her, for Braddell's affairs were found in such confusion, and his embarrassments so great, that everything was seized, and sold off; nothing left for the widow, nor for the child, (if the last were ever discovered.)

“As may be supposed, Mrs. Braddell was at first very clamorous for the lost child, but Jane Prior kept her promise, and withheld all clue to it. And Mrs. Braddell was forced to quit the place, in ignorance what had become of it; since then no one had heard of her, but Jane Prior says, that she is sure ‘she had come to no good.’ Now, though much of this may be, no doubt, familiar to you, dear Jason, it is right, when I put the evidence before you, that you should know, and guard against, what to expect; and in any trial at law, to prove the identity of Vincent Braddell, Jane Prior must be a principal witness, and will certainly not spare poor Mrs. Braddell. For the main point, however, viz., the suspicion of poisoning her husband, the inquest and verdict may set aside all alarm.

“My next researches have been directed on the track of Walter Ardworth, after leaving Liverpool, which (I find by the books at the inn where he lodged and was known) he did in debt to the inn-keeper, the very night he received the charge of the child. Here, as yet, I am in fault; but I have ascertained that a woman, one of the sect, of the

name of Joplin, living in a village fifteen miles from the town, had the care of some infant, to replace her own, which she had lost. I am going to this village to-morrow. But I cannot expect much in that quarter, since it would seem at variance with your more probable belief that Walter Ardworth took the child at once to Mr. Fielden's. However, you see I have already gone very far in the evidence;—the birth of the child—the delivery of the child to Ardworth. I see a very pretty case already before us, and I do not now doubt for a moment of ultimate success.

“Yours, N. GRABMAN.”

Lucretia read steadily, and with no change of countenance, to the last line of the letter. Then, as she put it down on the table before her, she repeated, with a tone of deep exultation—“No doubt of ultimate success !”

“You do not fear to brave all which the spite of this woman, Jane Prior, may prompt her to say against you?” asked Varney.

Lucretia's brow fell. “It is another torture,” she said, “even to own my marriage with a low-

born hypocrite. But I can endure it for the cause," she added, more haughtily. "Nothing can really hurt me in these obsolete aspersions, and this vague scandal. The inquest acquitted me, and the world will be charitable to the mother of him who has wealth and rank, and that vigorous genius which, if proved in obscurity, shall command opinion in renown."

"You are now, then, disposed at once to proceed to action. For Helen, all is prepared—the insurances settled—the trust for which I hold them on your behalf is signed and completed. But for Percival St. John, I await your directions. Will it be best first to prove your son's identity, or, when morally satisfied that that proof is forthcoming, to remove betimes *both* the barriers to his inheritance. If we tarry for the last, the removal of St. John becomes more suspicious than it does at a time when you have no visible interest in his death. Besides, now we have the occasion, or can make it—can we tell how long it will last? Again, it will seem more natural that the lover should break his heart in the first shock of——"

“Ay,” interrupted Lucretia, “I would have all thought and contemplation of crime at an end; when, clasping my boy to my heart, I can say—‘Your mother’s inheritance is yours.’ I would not have a murder before my eyes, when they should look only on the fair prospects beyond. I would cast back all the hideous images of horror into the rear of memory, so that hope may for once visit me again undisturbed. No, Gabriel, were I to speak for ever, you would comprehend not what I grasp at in a son! It is at a future! Rolling a stone over the sepulchre of the past—it is as a resurrection into a fresh world—it is to know again one emotion not impure—one scheme not criminal. It is, in a word, to cease to be as myself, to think in another soul, to hear my heart beat in another form. All this I covet in a son. And when all this should smile before me in his image, shall I be plucked back again into my hell, by the consciousness that a new crime is to be done? No; wade quickly through the passage of blood, that we may dry our garments, and breathe the air, upon the bank where sun shines and flowers bloom!”

“So be it, then!” said Varney. “Before the week is out, I must be under the same roof as St. John.—Before the week is out, why not all meet in the old halls of Laughton?”

“Ay, in the halls of Laughton! on the hearth of our ancestors, the deeds done for our descendants look less dark!”

“And first, to prepare the way, Helen should sicken in these fogs of London, and want change of air.”

“Place before me that desk. I will read William Mainwaring’s letters again and again, till from every shadow in the past a voice comes forth—‘The child of your rival, your betrayer, your undoer, stands between the daylight and your son!’”

CHAPTER XV.

VARIETIES.

LEAVING the guilty pair to concert their schemes, and indulge their atrocious hopes, we accompany Percival to the hovel occupied by Becky Carruthers.

On following Beck into the room she rented, Percival was greatly surprised to find, seated comfortably on the only chair to be seen, no less a person than the worthy Mrs. Mivers. The good lady blushed scarlet on being detected in her visit of charity, and hastened to excuse herself by the information that she belonged to a society of ladies for "the Bettering the Condition of the Poor," and that having just been informed of Mrs. Becky's destitute state, she had looked in to recommend her—a ventilator!

"It's quite shocking to see how little the poor attends to the proper ventilating their houses. No wonder there's so much typus about!" said Mrs. Mivers. "And for one-and-sixpence, we can introduce a stream of hair that goes up the chimney, and carries away all that it finds!"

"I 'umbly thank you, marm," said the poor bundle of rags that went by the name of 'Becky,' as, with some difficulty, she contrived to stand in the presence of the benevolent visitor; "but, I'm much afeard, that the hair will make the rheumatiz werry rumpatious!"

"On the contrary—on the contrary," said Mrs. Mivers triumphantly, and she proceeded philosophically to explain, that all the fevers, aches, pains, and physical ills that harass the poor, arise from the want of an air-trap in the chimney, and a perforated net-work in the window pane. Beck listened patiently; for Mrs. Mivers was only a philosopher in her talk, and she had proved herself anything but a philosopher in her actions, by the spontaneous present of five shillings, and the promise of a basket of victuals, and some

good wine to keep the cold wind she invited to the apartment out of the stomach.

Percival imitated the silence of Becky, whose spirit was so bowed down by an existence of drudgery, that not even the sight of her foster-son could draw her attention from the respect due to a superior.

“And is this poor cranky-looking cretur your son, Mrs. Becky?” said the visitor, struck at last by the appearance of the ex-Sweeper as he stood at the threshold, hat in hand.

“No, indeed, marm,” answered Becky; “I often says—says I—‘child, you be the son of Sint Poll’s.’”

Beck smiled proudly.

“It was agin the grit church, marm—but it’s a long story. My poor good man had not a long been dead—as good a man as h-ever lived, marm,” and Becky dropped a courtsey; “he fell off a scaffol, and pitched right on his ’ead—or I should not have come on the parish, marm—and that’s the truth on’t!”

“Very well, I shall call and hear all about it—a sad case, I dare say. You see, your husband

should have subscribed to our Loan Society, and then they'd have found him a 'andsome coffin, and given three pounds to his widder. But the poor are so benighted in these parts. I'm sure, sir, I can't guess what brought you here?—but that's no business of mine. And how are all at Old Brompton?"—here Mrs. Mivers bridled indignantly. "There was a time when Miss Mainwaring was very glad to come and chat with Mr. M. and myself; but now 'rum has riz,' as the saying is—not but what I dare say it's not her fault, poor thing!—that stiff aunt of hers!—*she* need not look so high—pride and poverty, forsooth!"

While delivering these conciliatory sentences, Mrs. Mivers had gathered up her gown, and was evidently in the bustle of departure. As she now nodded to Becky, Percival stepped up, and, with his irresistible smile, offered her his arm. Much surprised, and much flattered, Mrs. Mivers accepted it. As she did so, he gently detained her, while he said to Becky:

"My good friend, I have brought you the poor lad, to whom you have been a mother, to tell you

that good deeds find their reward sooner or later. As for him, make yourself easy ; he will inform you of the new step he has taken ; and for you, good, kind-hearted creature, thank the boy you brought up, if your old age shall be made easy and cheerful. Now Beck, silly lad, go and tell all to your nurse ! Take care of this step, Mrs. Mivers."

As soon as he was in the street, Percival, who, if amused at the ventilator, had seen the five shillings gleam on Becky's palm, and felt that he had found under the puce-coloured gown a good woman's heart to understand him, gave Mrs. Mivers a short sketch of poor Beck's history and misfortunes, and so contrived to interest her in behalf of the nurse, that she willingly promised to become Percival's almoner, to execute his commission, to improve the interior of Becky's abode, and distribute weekly the liberal stipend he proposed to settle on the old widow. They had grown, indeed, quite friendly and intimate, by the time he reached the smart plate-glazed mahogany-coloured *façade*, within which the flourishing business of Mr. Mivers was carried

on ; and when, knocking at the private door, promptly opened by a lemon-coloured page, she invited him up stairs, it so chanced that the conversation had slid off to Helen, and Percival was sufficiently interested to bow assent, and to enter.

Though all the way up the stairs, Mrs. Mivers, turning back at every other step, did her best to impress upon her young visitor's mind the important fact, that they kept their household establishment at their 'willer,' and that their apartments in Fleet-street were only a 'convenience'—the store set by the worthy housewife upon her goods and chattels was sufficiently visible in the drugget that threaded its narrow way up the gay Brussels stair-carpet, and in certain layers of paper, which protected from the profanation of immediate touch, the mahogany hand-rail. And nothing could exceed the fostering care exhibited in the drawing-room, when the door, thrown open, admitted a view of its damask moreen curtains, pinned back from such impertinent sunbeams as could force their way through the foggy air of the east into the windows, and the ells of yellow muslin that

guarded the frames, at least, of a collection of coloured prints, and two kit-cat portraitures of Mr. Mivers and his lady, from the perambulations of the flies.

But Percival's view of this interior was somewhat impeded by his portly guide, who, uttering a little exclamation of surprise, stood motionless on the threshold, as she perceived Mr. Mivers seated by the hearth in close conference with a gentleman whom she had never seen before. At that hour, it was so rare an event in the life of Mr. Mivers to be found in the drawing room, and that he should have an acquaintance unknown to his helpmate, was a circumstance so much rarer still, that Mrs. Mivers may well be forgiven for keeping St. John standing at the door till she had recovered her amaze.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mivers rose in some confusion, and was apparently about to introduce his guest, when that gentleman coughed and pinched the host's arm significantly. Mr. Mivers coughed also, and stammered out—"A gentleman, Mrs. M.—a friend;—stay with us a day or two. Much honoured—hum!"

Mrs. Mivers stared and courtseyed, and stared again. But there was an open, good-humoured smile in the face of the visitor, as he advanced and took her hand, that attracted a heart very easily conciliated. Seeing that that was no moment for further explanation, she plumped herself into a seat, and said—

“But bless us and save us, I am keeping you standing, Mr. St. John !”

“St. John !” repeated the visitor, with a vehemence that startled Mrs. Mivers.

“Your name is St. John, sir—related to the St. Johns of Laughton ?”

“Yes, indeed,” answered Percival, with his shy, arch smile, “Laughton at present has no worthier owner than myself.”

The gentleman made two strides to Percival, and shook him heartily by the hand.

“This is pleasant, indeed !” he exclaimed. “You must excuse my freedom ; but I knew well poor old Sir Miles, and my heart warms at the sight of his representative.”

Percival glanced at his new acquaintance, and on the whole was prepossessed in his favour. He

seemed somewhere on the sunnier side of fifty, with that superb yellow bronze of complexion which betokens long residence under eastern skies. Deep wrinkles near the eyes, and a dark circle round them, spoke of cares and fatigue, and perhaps dissipation. But he had evidently a vigour of constitution that had borne him passably through all ; his frame was wiry and nervous ; his eye bright and full of life ; and there was that abrupt, unsteady, mercurial restlessness in his movements and manner, which usually accompanies the man whose sanguine temperament prompts him to concede to the impulse, and who is blessed or cursed with a superabundance of energy, according as circumstance may favour or judgment correct, that equivocal gift of constitution.

Percival said something appropriate in reply to so much cordiality paid to the account of the Sir Miles whom he had never seen, and seated himself,—colouring slightly under the influence of the fixed, pleased, and earnest look still bent upon him.

Searching for something else to say, Percival asked Mrs. Mivèrs if she had lately seen John Ardworth.

The guest, who had just reseated himself, turned his chair round at that question with such vivacity, that Mrs. Mivers heard it crack. Her chairs were not meant for such usage. A shade fell over her rosy countenance as she replied—

“No, indeed, (please, sir, them chairs is brittle!) No,—he is like Madam at Brompton, and seldom condescends to favour us now. It was but last Sunday we asked him to dinner. I am sure he need not turn up his nose at our roast beef and pudding!”

Here Mr. Mivers was taken with a violent fit of coughing, which drew off his wife’s attention. She was afraid he had taken cold.

The stranger took out a large snuff-box, inhaled a long pinch of snuff, and said to St. John :

“This Mr. John Ardworth, a pert enough Jack-anapes, I suppose—a limb of the law, eh?”

“Sir,” said Percival, gravely ; “John Ardworth is my particular friend. It is clear that you know very little of him.”

“That’s true,” said the stranger—“’pon my life, that’s very true. But I suppose he’s like all lawyers—cunning and tricky, conceited and su-

percilious, full of prejudice and cant, and a red-hot tory into the bargain. I know them, sir—I know them!”

“Well,” answered St. John, half gaily, half angrily, “your general experience serves you very little here; for Ardworth is exactly the opposite of all you have described.”

“Even in politics?”

“Why, I fear he is half a Radical—certainly more than a Whig,” answered St. John, rather mournfully; for his own theories were all the other way, notwithstanding his unpatriotic forgetfulness of them, in his offer to assist Ardworth’s entrance into parliament.

“I am very glad to hear it,” cried the stranger, again taking snuff. “And this Madame at Brompton—perhaps I know her a little better than I do young Mr. Ardworth—Mrs. Brad—I mean Madame Dalibard!” and the stranger glanced at Mr. Mivers, who was slowly recovering from some vigorous slaps on the back, administered to him by his wife, as a counter-irritant to the cough. “Is it true that she has lost the use of her limbs?”

Percival shook his head.

“And takes care of poor Helen Mainwaring, the orphan? Well, well! that looks amiable enough. I must see—I must see!”

“Who shall I say inquired after her, when I see Madame Dalibard?” asked Percival, with some curiosity.

“Who! Oh, Mr. Tomkins. She will not recollect him, though,”—and the stranger laughed, and Mr. Mivers laughed, too; and Mrs. Mivers, who, indeed, always laughed when other people laughed, laughed also. So Percival thought he ought to laugh for the sake of good company, and all laughed together, as he rose and took leave.

He had not, however, got far from the house, on his way to his cabriolet, which he had left by Temple Bar, when, somewhat to his surprise, he found Mr. Tomkins at his elbow.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. St. John, but I have only just returned to England, and on such occasions a man is apt to seem curious. This young lawyer; you see old Ardworth—(good-for-nothing scamp!)—was a sort of friend of mine—

not exactly friend, indeed, for, by Jove, I think he was a worse friend to me than he was to anybody else,—still I had a foolish interest for him, and should be glad to hear something more about any one bearing his name, than I can coax out of that droll little linendraper. You are really intimate with young Ardworth, eh?”

“Intimate! poor fellow, he will not let any one be that! He works too hard to be social. But I love him sincerely; and I admire him beyond measure.”

“The dog has industry, then—that’s good. And does he make debts, like that rascal, Ardworth, senior?”

“Really, sir, I must say, this tone with respect to Mr. Ardworth’s father——”

“What the devil, sir! Do you take the father’s part, as well as the son’s?”

“I don’t know anything about Mr. Ardworth, senior,” said Percival, pouting; “but I do know that my friend would not allow any one to speak ill of his father in his presence; and I beg you, sir, to consider, that whatever would offend him, must offend me.”

"Gad's my life ! He is the luckiest young rogue to have such a friend. Sir, I wish you a very good day."

Mr. Tomkins took off his hat—bowed—and passing St. John with a rapid step, was soon lost to his eye amongst the crowd hurrying westward.

But our business being now rather with him than Percival, we leave the latter to mount his cabriolet, and we proceed with Mr. Mivers's mercurial guest on his eccentric way through the throng.

There was an odd mixture of thoughtful abstraction and quick observation in the soliloquy in which this gentleman indulged, as he walked briskly on.

"A pretty young spark, that St. John ! A look of his father, but handsomer, and less affected. I like him. Fine shop that—very ! London wonderfully improved. A hookah in that window !—God bless me !—a real hookah ! This is all very good news about that poor boy—very. After all, he is not to blame if his mother was such a damnable—I must contrive to see and judge of

him myself as soon as possible. Can't trust to others—too sharp for that! What an ugly dog that is, looking after me! It is certainly a bailiff. Hang it!—what do I care for bailiffs? Hem—hem!” And the gentleman thrust his hands into his pockets, and laughed, as the jingle of coin reached his ear through the din without. “Well, I must make haste to decide; for, really there is a very troublesome piece of business before me. Plague take her!—what can have become of the woman? I shall have to hunt out a sharp lawyer. But John's a lawyer himself. No—attorneys, I suppose, are the men. Gad! they were sharp enough when they had to hunt me! What's that great bill on the wall about?—‘Down with the Lords.’ Pooh, pooh! Master John Bull, you love Lords a great deal too much for that. A prettyish girl! English women are very good-looking, certainly. That Lucretia—what shall I do, *if*—Ah, time enough to think of her, when I have got over that mighty stiff *if*!”

In such cogitations and mental remarks our traveller whiled away the time, till he found himself in Piccadilly. There, a publisher's shop, (and

he had that keen eye for shops which betrays the stranger in London,) with its new publications exposed at the window attracted his notice. Conspicuous amongst the rest was the open title-page of a book, at the foot of which was placed a placard, with the enticing words—‘FOURTH EDITION: JUST OUT,’ in red capitals. The title of the work struck his irritable curious fancy; he walked into the shop—asked for the volume—and while looking over the contents, with muttered ejaculations: “Good!—capital! why this reminds one of Horne Tooke! What’s the price? very dear—must have it though—must. Ha! ha! home thrust there!”—while thus turning over the leaves, and rending them asunder with his fore-finger, regardless of the paper-cutter extended to him by the shopman, a gentleman pushing by him, asked if the publisher was at home; and as the shopman, bowing very low, answered, “Yes,” the new-comer darted into a little recess behind the shop. Mr. Tomkins, who had looked up very angrily on being jostled so unceremoniously, started and changed colour, when he saw the face of the offender. “Saints in heaven!” he

murmured almost audibly; "what a look of that woman! and yet—no—it is gone!"

"Who is that gentleman?" he asked, abruptly, as he paid for his book.

The shopman smiled, but answered, "I don't know, sir."

"That's a lie!—you would never bow so low to a man you did not know!"

The shopman smiled again. "Why, sir, there are many who come to this house who don't wish us to know them."

"Ah, I understand! you are political publishers—afraid of libels, I dare say. Always the same thing in this cursed country, and then they tell us we are 'free!' So I suppose that gentleman has written something William Pitt does not like. But, William Pitt!—ha—he's dead!—very true, so he is! Sir, this little book seems most excellent; but, in my time, a man would have been sent to Newgate for printing it."

While thus running on, Mr. Tomkins had edged himself pretty close to the recess, within which the last comer had disappeared; and there, seated on a high stool, he contrived to read and to talk

at the same time, but his eye and his ear were both turned every instant towards the recess.

The shopman, little suspecting that in so very eccentric, garrulous a person he was permitting a spy to encroach upon the secrets of the house, continued to make up sundry parcels of the new publication which had so enchanted his customer, while he expatiated on the prodigious sensation the book had created; and while the customer himself had already caught enough of the low conversation within the recess to be aware that the author of the book was the very person who had so roused his curiosity.

Not till that gentleman, followed to the door by the polite publisher, had quitted the shop, did Mr. Tomkins put his volume in his pocket, and, with a familiar nod at the shopman, take himself off.

He was scarcely in the street, when he saw Percival St. John leaning out of his cabriolet, and conversing with the author he had discovered. He halted a moment irresolute, but the young man, in whom our reader recognises John Ardworth, declining St. John's invitation to accompany him to Brompton, resumed his way through the

throng ; the cabriolet drove on ; and Mr. Tomkins, though with a graver mien, and a steadier step, continued his desultory rambles. Meanwhile, John Ardworth strode gloomily back to his lonely chamber.

There, throwing himself on the well-worn chair before the crowded desk, he buried his face in his hands, and for some minutes he felt all that profound despondency, peculiar to those who have won fame, to add to the dark volume of experience the conviction of fame's nothingness. For some minutes, he felt an illiberal and ungrateful envy of St. John—so fair, so light-hearted, so favoured by fortune, so rich in friends—in a mother's love, and in Helen's half-plighted troth. And he, from his very birth, cut off from the social ties of blood—no mother's kiss to reward the toils, or gladden the sports, of childhood—no father's cheering word up the steep hill of man ! And Helen, for whose sake he had so often, when his heart grew weary, nerved himself again to labour, saying—"Let me be rich, let me be great, and then I will dare to tell Helen that I love her !"—Helen smiling upon

another, unconscious of his pangs! What could fame bestow in compensation? What matter that strangers praised, and the babble of the world's running stream lingered its brief moment round the pebble in its way. In the bitterness of his mood, he was unjust to his rival. All that exquisite, but half-concealed treasure of imagination and thought, which lay beneath the surface of Helen's childlike smile, he believed that he alone—he, soul of power and son of genius, was worthy to discover and to prize. In the pride not unfrequent with that kingliest of all aristocracies, the Chiefs of Intellect, he forgot the grandeur which invests the attributes of the heart—forgot that, in the lists of love, the heart is at least the equal of the mind. In the reaction that follows great excitement, Ardworth had morbidly felt, that day, his utter solitude—felt it in the streets through which he had passed—in the home to which he had returned—the burning tears, shed for the first time since childhood, forced themselves through his clasped fingers. At length, he rose, with a strong effort at self-mastery—some contempt of his weakness,

and much remorse at his ungrateful envy. He gathered together the soiled manuscript and dingy proofs of his book, and thrust them through the grimy bars of his grate; then, opening his desk, he drew out a small packet, with tremulous fingers, unfolding paper after paper, and gazed with eyes still moistened, on the relics kept till then, in the devotion of the only *sentiment* inspired by Eros, that had ever, perhaps, softened his iron nature: These were two notes from Helen—some violets she had once given him, and a little purse she had knitted for him (with a playful prophecy of future fortunes), when he had last left the vicarage. Nor blame him, ye who with more habitual romance of temper, and richer fertility of imagination, can reconcile the tenderest memories with the sternest duties, if he, with all his strength, felt that the associations connected with those tokens would but enervate his resolves, and embitter his resignation. You can guess not the extent of the sacrifice, the bitterness of the pang, when, averting his head, he dropped those relics on the hearth. The evidence of the desultory ambition, the

tokens of the visionary love—the same flame leapt up to devour both! It was as the funeral pyre of his youth!

“So!” he said to himself, “let all that can divert me from the true ends of my life—consume!—Labour, take back your son.”

An hour afterwards, and his clerk, returning home, found Ardworth employed as calmly as usual on his Law Reports.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVITATION TO LAUGHTON.

THAT day, when he called at Brompton, Percival reported to Madame Dalibard his interview with the eccentric Mr. Tomkins. Lucretia seemed chafed and disconcerted by the inquiries with which that gentleman had honoured her, and as soon as Percival had gone, she sent for Varney. He did not come till late—she repeated to him what St. John had said of the stranger. Varney participated in her uneasy alarm. The name, indeed, was unknown to them, nor could they conjecture the bearer of so ordinary a patronymic; but there had been secrets enow in Lucretia's life, to render her apprehensive of

encountering those who had known her in earlier years; and Varney feared lest any rumour reported to St. John might create his mistrust, or lessen the hold obtained upon a victim heretofore so unsuspecting. They both agreed in the expediency of withdrawing themselves and St. John, as soon as possible, from London, and frustrating Percival's chance of closer intercourse with the stranger, who had evidently aroused his curiosity.

The next day Helen was much indisposed, and the symptoms grew so grave towards the evening, that Madame Dalibard expressed alarm, and willingly suffered Percival (who had only been permitted to see Helen for a few minutes, when her lassitude was so extreme that she was obliged to retire to her room) to go in search of a physician: he returned with one of the most eminent of the faculty. On the way to Brompton, in reply to the questions of Dr. —, Percival spoke of the dejection to which Helen was occasionally subject, and this circumstance confirmed Dr. —, after he had seen his patient, in his view of the case. In addition to some feverish and inflammatory

symptoms which he trusted his prescriptions would speedily remove, he found great nervous debility, and willingly fell in with the casual suggestion of Varney, who was present, that change of air would greatly improve Miss Mainwaring's general health, as soon as the temporary acute attack had subsided. He did not regard the present complaint very seriously, and reassured poor Percival by his cheerful mien and sanguine predictions. Percival remained at the house the whole day, and had the satisfaction, before he left, of hearing that the remedies had already abated the fever, and that Helen had fallen into a profound sleep. Walking back to town with Varney, the last said, hesitatingly — " You were saying to me, the other day, that you feared you should have to go, for a few days, both to Vernon Grange and to Laughton, as your steward wished to point out to you some extensive alterations in the management of your woods, to commence this autumn. As you were so soon coming of age, Lady Mary desired that her directions should now yield to your own. Now, since Helen is recommended change of air, why not

invite Madame Dalibard to visit you at one of these places? I would suggest Laughton. My poor mother-in-law, I know, longs to revisit the scene of her youth, and you could not compliment or conciliate her more than by such an invitation."

"Oh," said Percival, joyfully, "it would realize the fondest dream of my heart to see Helen under the old roof-tree of Laughton; but as my mother is abroad, and there is therefore no lady to receive them, perhaps ——"

"Why," interrupted Varney, "Madame Dalibard herself is almost the very person whom *les bienséances* might induce you to select to do the honours of your house in Lady Mary's absence; not only as kinswoman to yourself, but as the nearest surviving relative of Sir Miles—the most immediate descendant of the St. Johns; her mature years and decorum of life, her joint kindred to Helen and yourself, surely remove every appearance of impropriety."

"If she thinks so, certainly—I am no accurate judge of such formalities. You could not oblige me more, Varney, than in pre-obtaining her con-

sent to the proposal. Helen at Laughton!—Oh, blissful thought!”

“And in what air would she be so likely to revive?” said Varney, but his voice was thick and husky.

The ideas thus presented to him, almost banished its anxiety from Percival's breast. In a thousand delightful shapes they haunted him during the sleepless night. And when, the next morning, he found that Helen was surprisingly better, he pressed his invitation upon Madame Dalibard, with a warmth that made her cheek yet more pale, and the hand, which the boy grasped as he pleaded, as cold as the dead. But she briefly consented, and Percival, allowed a brief interview with Helen, had the rapture to see her smile in a delight as childlike as his own at the news he communicated, and listen, with swimming eyes, when he dwelt on the walks they should take together, amidst haunts to become henceforth dear to her as to himself. Fairy land dawned before them.

The visit of the physician justified Percival's heightened spirits. All the acuter symptoms had

vanished already. He sanctioned his patient's departure from town as soon as Madame Dalibard's convenience would permit, and recommended only a course of restorative medicines to strengthen the nervous system, which was to commence with the following morning, and he persisted in for some weeks. He dwelt much on the effect to be derived from taking these medicines, the first thing in the day, as soon as Helen woke. Varney and Madame Dalibard exchanged a rapid glance. Charmed with the success that in this instance had attended the skill of the great physician, Percival, in his usual zealous benevolence, now eagerly pressed upon Madame Dalibard the wisdom of consulting Dr. ——— for her own malady ; and the doctor, putting on his spectacles, and drawing his chair nearer to the frowning cripple, began to question her of her state ; but Madame Dalibard abruptly and discourteously put a stop to all interrogatories—she had already exhausted all remedies art could suggest—she had become reconciled to her deplorable infirmity, and lost all faith in physicians ;—some day or other she might try the baths at Egra, but, till

then, she must be permitted to suffer undisturbed.

The doctor, by no means wishing to undertake a case of chronic paralysis, rose smilingly, and with a liberal confession that the German baths were sometimes extremely efficacious in such complaints, pressed Percival's outstretched hand, then slipped his own into his pocket, and bowed his way out of the room.

Relieved from all apprehension, Percival very good humouredly received the hint of Madame Dalibard, that the excitement through which she had gone for the last twenty-four hours, rendered her unfit for his society; and went home to write to Laughton, and prepare all things for the reception of his guests. Varney accompanied him. Percival found Beck in the hall, already much altered, and embellished, by a new suit of livery. The ex-sweeper stared hard at Varney, who, without recognising, in so smart a shape, the squalid tatterdemalion who had lighted him up the stairs to Mr. Grabman's apartments, passed him by into Percival's little study, on the ground-floor.

“Well, Beck,” said Percival, ever mindful of others, and attributing his groom’s astonished gaze at Varney to his admiration of that gentleman’s showy exterior—“I shall send you down to the country to-morrow with two of the horses—so you may have to-day to yourself, to take leave of your nurse. I flatter myself you will find her rooms a little more comfortable than they were yesterday.”

Beck heard with a bursting heart; and his master, giving him a cheering tap on the shoulder, left him to find his way into the streets, and to Becky’s abode.

He found, indeed, that the last had already undergone the magic transformation which is ever at the command of godlike wealth. Mrs. Mivers, who was naturally prompt and active, had had pleasure in executing Percival’s commission. Early in the morning, floors had been scrubbed—the windows cleaned—the ventilator fixed;—then followed porters with chairs and tables, and a wonderful Dutch clock, and new bedding, and a bright piece of carpet; and then came two servants belonging to Mrs. Mivers to arrange the

chattels ; and finally, when all was nearly completed, the Avatar of Mrs. Mivers herself, to give the last finish with her own mittened hands, and in her own housewifely apron.

The good lady was still employed in ranging a set of teacups on the shelves of the dresser, when Beck entered ; and his old nurse, in the overflow of her gratitude, hobbled up to her foundling, and threw her arms round his neck.

“ That’s right ! ” said Mrs. Mivers, good-humouredly, turning round, and wiping the tear from her eye. “ You ought to make much of him, poor lad ; he has turned out a God-send, indeed ; and, upon my word, he looks very respectable in his new clothes. But what is this—a child’s coral ? ” as, opening a drawer in the dresser, she discovered Beck’s treasure. “ Dear me, it is a very handsome one—why, these bells look like gold ! ”—and, suspicion of her *protégé’s* honesty, for a moment, contracted her thoughtful brow—“ how ever on earth did you come by this, Mrs. Becky ? ”

“ Sure and sartin,” answered Becky, dropping her mutilated courtsey, “ I be’s glad it be found

now, instead of sum days afore, or I might have been vicked enough to let it go vith the rest to the pop-shop; and I'm sure the time's out of mind, ven that 'ere boy was a h-urchin, that I've risted the timptashung, and said, 'No, Becky Carruthers, that maun't go to my h-uncle's!'"

"And why not, my good woman?"

"Lor' love you, marm, if that curril could speak, who knows vot it might say—eh, lad, who knows? You sees, marm, my good man had not a long been dead—I could not a get no vork, no vays—'Becky Carruthers,' says I, 'you must go out in the streets a begging!' I niver thought I should a come to that. But my poor husband, you sees, marm, fell from a scaffol,—as good a man as h-ever——"

"Yes, yes, you told me all that before," said Mrs. Mivers, growing impatient, and already diverted from her interest in the coral by a new cargo, all bright from the tinman, which, indeed, no less instantaneously, absorbed the admiration both of Beck and his nurse. And what with the inspection of these articles, and the comments each provoked, the coral rested in peace on the dresser,

till Mrs. Mivers, when just about to renew her inquiries, was startled by the sound of the Dutch clock striking four,—a voice which reminded her of the lapse of time, and her own dinner hour. So, with many promises to call again, and have a good chat with her humble friend, she took her departure, amidst the blessings of Becky, and the less noisy, but not less grateful salutations of Beck.

Very happy was the evening these poor creatures passed together over their first cup of tea from the new bright copper kettle, and the almost-forgotten luxury of crumpets, in which their altered circumstances permitted them, without extravagance, to indulge. In the course of conversation, Beck communicated how much he had been astonished by recognising the visitor of Grabman, the provoker of the irritable grave-stealer, in the familiar companion of his master; and when Becky told him how often in the domestic experience her avocation of charring had accumulated, she had heard of the ruin brought on rich young men, by gamblers and sharpers, Beck promised to himself to keep a

sharp eye on Grabman's showy acquaintance. "For master is but a babe like," said he, majestically; "and I'd be cut into mincemeat afore I'd let an 'air on his 'ead come to 'arm, if so be's h-as ow I could perwent it."

We need not say that his nurse confirmed him in these good resolutions.

"And now," said Beck, when the time came for parting, "you'll keep from the gin-shop, old 'oman, and not shame the young master?"

"Sartin sure," answered Becky; "it is only ven vun is down in the vorld that vun goes to the licker-shop. Now, h-indeed,"—and she looked round very proudly—"I 'as a 'spectable stashion, and I vouldn't go for to lower it, and let 'em say that Becky Carruthers does not know how to conduct herself. The curril will be safe enuff now—but praps you had best take it yourself, lad."

"Vot should I do vith it? I've had enuff of the 'sponsibility. Put it up in a 'ankerchiff, and praps ven master get's married, and 'as a babby vot's teethin', he vill say, 'Thank ye, Beck, for your curril.' Would not that make us proud, mammy?"

Chuckling heartily at that vision, Beck kissed his nurse, and trying hard to keep himself upright, and do credit to the dignity of his cloth, returned to his new room over the stables.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WAKING OF THE SERPENT.

AND how, O Poet of the sad belief, and eloquence,
 “like ebony at once dark and splendid,”* how
 couldst thou, august Lucretius, deem it but sweet
 to behold from the steep the strife of the great sea,
 or, safe from the peril, gaze on the wrath of the
 battle, or, serene in the temples of the wise, look
 afar on the wanderings of human error? Is it so
 sweet to survey the ills from which thou art
 delivered? Shall not the strong law of SYMPATHY
 find thee out, and thy heart rebuke thy philo-
 sophy? Not sweet, indeed, can be man’s shelter

* It was said of *Tertullian*, that ‘his style was, like ebony, dark and splendid.’

in self, when he says to the storm, "I have no bark on the sea;" or to the gods of the battle, "I have no son in the slaughter;"—when he smiles unmoved upon Woe, and murmurs, "Weep on, for these eyes know no tears;"—when unappalled, he beholdeth the black deeds of crime, and cries to his conscience, "Thou art calm:"—Yet solemn is the sight to him, who lives in all life; seeks for Nature in the storm, and Providence in the battle; loses self in the woe; probes his heart in the crime; and owns no philosophy that sets him free from the fetters of man. Not in vain do we scan all the contrasts in the large frame-work of civilized earth, if we note, "when the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together." Range, O Art, through all space, clasp together all extremes, shake idle Wealth from its lethargy, and bid States look in hovels, where the teacher is dumb, and Reason unweeded runs to rot! Bid haughty Intellect pause in its triumph, and doubt if intellect alone can deliver the soul from its tempters!—Only that lives uncorrupt, which preserves in all seasons the human affections in which the breath of God breathes, and is! Go

forth to the world, O Art!—go forth to the innocent, the guilty;—the wise, and the dull!—go forth as the still voice of Fate!—speak of the insecurity even of Goodness below!—carry on the rapt vision of suffering Virtue through “the doors of the shadows of death!”—show the dim revelation symbolled forth in the Tragedy of old!—how incomplete is man’s destiny, how undeveloped is the justice divine, if Antigone sleep eternally in the ribs of the rock, and Œdipus vanish for ever in the Grove of the Furies! Here, below, “the waters are hid with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen!” But above liveth He “who can bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and loose the bands of Orion.” Go with Fate over the bridge, and she vanishes in the land beyond the gulf! Behold where the Eternal demands Eternity for the progress of His creatures, and the vindication of His justice!

It was past midnight, and Lucretia sate alone in her dreary room; her head buried on her bosom, her eyes fixed on the ground, her hands resting on her knees:—it was an image of inanimate prostration and decrepitude that might

have moved compassion to its depth. The door opened, and Martha entered, to assist Madame Dalibard, as usual, to retire to rest. Her mistress slowly raised her eyes at the noise of the opening door, and those eyes took their searching, penetrating acuteness, as they fixed upon the florid, nor uncomely countenance of the waiting-woman.

In her starched cap, her sober-coloured stuff gown—in her prim, quiet manner, and a certain sanctified demureness of aspect, there was something in the first appearance of this woman, that impressed you with the notion of respectability, and inspired confidence in those steady, good qualities which we seek in a trusty servant. But, more closely examined, an habitual observer might have found much to qualify, perhaps to disturb, his first prepossessions. The exceeding lowness of the forehead, over which that stiff, harsh hair was so puritanically parted—the severe hardness of those thin, small lips, so pursed up and constrained—even a certain dull cruelty in those light, cold blue eyes, might have caused an uneasy sentiment, almost approaching to fear.

The fat grocer's spoiled child instinctively recoiled from her, when she entered the shop to make her household purchases—the old, grey-whiskered terrier dog, at the public house, slunk into the tap when she crossed the threshold.

Madame Dalibard silently suffered herself to be wheeled into the adjoining bed-room, and the process of disrobing was nearly completed, before she said, abruptly—

“So you attended Mr. Varney's uncle in his last illness. Did he suffer much?”

“He was a poor creature, at best,” answered Martha; “but he gave me a deal of trouble afore he went. He was a scranny corpse when I strecked him out.”

Madame Dalibard shrank from the hands at that moment employed upon herself, and said—

“It was not, then, the first corpse you have laid out for the grave?”

“Not by a many.”

“And did any of those you so prepared, die of the same complaint?”

“I can't say, I'm sure,” returned Martha. “I never inquires how folks die; my bizness was to

nurse 'em till all was over, and then to sit up. As they say in my country—'Riving Pike wears a hood, when the weather bodes ill.'”*

“And when you sat up with Mr. Varney's uncle, did you feel no fear in the dead of the night?—that corpse before you—no fear?”

“Young Mr. Varney said I should come to no harm. Oh, he's a clever man. What should I fear, ma'am?” answered Martha, with a horrid simplicity.

“You have belonged to a very religious sect, I think I have heard you say—a sect not unfamiliar to me—a sect to which great crime is very rarely known.”

“Yes, ma'am, some of 'em be tame enough, but others be weel† deep!”

“You do not believe what they taught you?”

“I did, when I was young and silly.”

“And what disturbed your belief?”

“Ma'am, the man what taught me, and my mo-

* “If Riving Pike do wear a hood,
The day, be sure, will ne'er be good.”

A LANCASHIRE DISTICH.

† *Weel*,—whirlpool.

ther afore me, was the first I ever kep company with," answered Martha, without a change in her florid hue, which seemed fixed in her cheek, as the red in an autumn leaf. "After he had ruined me, as the girls say, he told me as how it was all sham!"

"You loved him, then?"

"The man was well enough, ma'am, and he behaved handsome, and got me a husband. I've known better days."

"You sleep well at night?"

"Yes, ma'am, thank you, I loves my bed."

"I have done with you," said Madame Dali-bard, stifling a groan, as now, placed in her bed, she turned to the wall. Martha extinguished the candle, leaving it on the table by the bed, with a book and a box of matches, for Madame Dali-bard was a bad sleeper, and often read in the night. She then drew the curtains, and went her way.

It might be an hour after Martha had retired to rest, that a hand was stretched from the bed, that the candle was lighted, and Lucretia Dali-bard rose; with a sudden movement she threw aside the coverings, and stood in her long

night-gear on the floor. Yes, the helpless, paralyzed cripple rose—was on her feet—tall, elastic, erect! It was as a resuscitation from the grave. Never was change more startling than that simple action effected—not in the form alone, but the whole character of the face. The solitary light streamed upward on a countenance, on every line of which spoke sinister power and strong resolve. If you had ever seen her before, in her false, crippled state, prostrate and helpless, and could have seen her then—those eyes, if haggard still, now full of life and vigour—that frame, if spare, towering aloft in commanding stature, perfect in its proportions as a Grecian image of Nemesis—your amaze would have merged into terror, so preternatural did the transformation appear!—so did aspect and bearing contradict the very character of her sex; uniting the two elements, most formidable in man or in fiend—wickedness and power!

She stood a moment motionless, breathing loud, as if it were a joy to breathe free from restraint, and then, lifting the light, and gliding to the adjoining room, she unlocked a bureau in the corner,

and bent over a small casket, which she opened with a secret spring.

Reader, cast back your eye to that passage in this history, when Lucretia Clavering took down the volume from the niche in the tapestried chamber at Laughton, and numbered, in thought, the hours left to a human life. Look back on the guilty thought—behold, how it has swelled and ripened into the guilty deed ! There, in that box, Death guards his treasure-crypt. There, all the Science of Hades numbers its murderous inventions. As she searched for the ingredients her design had pre-selected, something heavier than those small packets she deranged, fell to the bottom of the box with a low and hollow sound. She started at the noise, and then smiled, in scorn of her momentary fear, as she took up the ring that had occasioned the sound—a ring plain and solid, like those used as signets in the Middle Ages, with a large dull opal in the centre. What secret could that bauble have in common with its ghastly companions in Death's crypt ? This had been found amongst Olivier's papers ; a note in that precious manuscript, which had given to the

hands of his successors the keys of the grave, had discovered the mystery of its uses. By the pressure of the hand, at the touch of a concealed spring, a barbed point flew forth, steeped in venom, more deadly than the Indian extracts from the bag of the cobra-capella—a venom to which no antidote is known, which no test can detect. It corrupts the whole mass of the blood—it mounts in frenzy and fire to the brain—it rends the soul from the body in spasm and convulsion. But examine the dead, and how divine the effect of the cause?—how go back to the records of the Borgias, and amidst all the scepticism of times in which, happily, such arts are unknown, unsuspected, learn from the hero of Machiavel how a clasp of the hand can get rid of a foe? Easier and more natural to point to the livid puncture in the skin, and the swollen flesh round it, and dilate on the danger a rusty nail—nay, a pin, can engender—when the humours are peccant, and the blood is impure ! The fabrication of that bauble, the discovery of Borgia's device, was the masterpiece in the science of Dalibard ; a curious and philosophical triumph of research, hitherto

unused by its inventor and his heirs; for that casket is rich in the choice of more gentle materials; but the use yet may come. As she gazed on the ring, there was a complacent and proud expression on Lucretia's face.

“Dumb token of Cæsar Borgia!” she murmured—“him of the wisest head and the boldest hand that ever grasped at empire;—whom Machiavel the virtuous, rightly praised as the model of accomplished ambition! Why should I falter in the paths which he trod with his royal step, only because my goal is not a throne? Every circle is as complete in itself, whether rounding a globule or a star. Why groan in the belief that the mind defiles itself by the darkness through which it glides on its object, or the mire through which it ascends to the hill? Murderer as he was, poisoner, and fratricide—did blood clog his intellect? or crime impoverish the luxury of his genius? Was his verse less melodious,* or his

* It is well known that Cæsar Borgia was both a munificent patron and an exquisite appreciator of art—well known also are his powers of persuasion; but the general reader may not perhaps be acquainted with the fact, that this terrible criminal was also a poet.

love of art less intense, or his eloquence less persuasive, because he sought to remove every barrier, revenge every wrong, crush every foe?"

In the wondrous corruption to which her mind had descended, thus murmured Lucretia. Intellect, had been so long made her sole god, that the very monster of history was lifted to her reverence by his ruthless intellect alone; lifted, in that mood of feverish excitement, when conscience, often less silenced, lay crushed under the load of the deed to come, into an example and a guide.

Though, at times, when looking back, oppressed by the blackest despair, no remorse of the past ever weakened those nerves, when the Hour called up its demon, and the Will ruled the rest of the human being as a machine.

She replaced the ring—she reclosed the casket, and relocked its depository; then passed again into the adjoining chamber.

A few minutes afterwards, and the dim light that stole from the heavens (in which the moon was partially overcast), through the casement on the staircase, rested on a shapeless figure, robed

in black from head to foot—a figure so obscure and indefinable in outline, so suited to the gloom in its hue, so stealthy and rapid in its movements, that, had you started from sleep, and seen it on your floor, you would, perforce, have deemed that your fancy had befooled you !

Thus darkly, through the darkness, went the Poisoner to her prey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETROSPECT.

WE have now arrived at that stage in this history when it is necessary to look back on the interval in Lucretia's life—between the death of Dalibard, and her re-introduction, in the second portion of our tale.

One day, without previous notice or warning, Lucretia arrived at William Mainwaring's house; she was in the deep weeds of widowhood, and that garb of mourning sufficed to add Susan's tenderest commiseration to the warmth of her affectionate welcome. Lucretia appeared to have forgiven the past, and to have conquered its more painful recollections; she was gentle to Susan,

though she rather suffered than returned her caresses; she was open and frank to William. Both felt inexpressibly grateful for her visit—the forgiveness it betokened, and the confidence it implied. At this time, no condition could be more promising and prosperous than that of the young banker. From the first, the most active partner in the bank, he had now virtually almost monopolized the business. The senior partner was old and infirm; the second had a bucolic turn, and was much taken up by the care of a large farm he had recently purchased, so that Mainwaring, more and more trusted and honoured, became the sole managing administrator of the firm. Business thrived in his able hands; and with patient and steady perseverance there was little doubt but what, before middle age was attained, his competence would have swelled into a fortune sufficient to justify him in realizing the secret dream of his heart—the parliamentary representation of the town in which he had already secured the affection and esteem of the inhabitants.

It was not long before Lucretia detected the

ambition William's industry but partially concealed ; it was not long before, with the ascendancy natural to her will and her talents, she began to exercise considerable, though unconscious, influence over a man in whom a thousand good qualities, and some great talents were unhappily accompanied by infirm purpose and weak resolutions. The ordinary conversation of Lucretia, unsettled his mind and inflamed his vanity—a conversation able, aspiring, full both of knowledge drawn from books, and of that experience of public men, which her residence in Paris—(whereon, with its new and greater Charlemagne, the eyes of the world were turned) had added to her acquisitions in the lore of human life. Nothing more disturbs a mind like William Mainwaring's than that species of eloquence which rebukes its patience in the present, by inflaming all its hopes in the future. Lucretia had none of the charming babble of women—none of that tender interest in household details, in the minutiae of domestic life, which relaxes the intellect while softening the heart. Hard and vigorous, her sentences came forth in eternal appeal to the

reason, or address to the sterner passions in which love has no share. Beside this strong thinker, poor Susan's sweet talk seemed frivolous and inane. Her soft hold upon Mainwaring loosened : He ceased to consult her upon business—he began to repine that the partner of his lot could have little sympathy with his dreams—more often and more bitterly now did his discontented glance, in his way homeward, rove to the roof-tops of the rural member for the town ; more eagerly did he read the parliamentary debates—
x more heavily did he sigh at the thought of eloquence denied a vent, and ambition delayed in its career.

When arrived at this state of mind, Lucretia's conversation took a more worldly, a more practical turn. Her knowledge of the speculators of Paris instructed her pictures of bold ingenuity creating sudden wealth ; she spoke of fortunes made in a day—of *parvenus* bursting into *millionaires*—of wealth as the necessary instrument of ambition, as the arch ruler of the civilized world. Never once, be it observed, in these temptations, did Lucretia address herself to the heart—the

ordinary channels of vulgar seduction were disdained by her; she would not have stooped so low as Mainwaring's love, could she have commanded or allured it; she was willing to leave to Susan the husband reft from her own passionate youth, but leave him with the brand on his brow and the worm at his heart—a scoff and a wreck.

At this time, there was in that market town, one of those adventurous speculative men, who are the more dangerous impostors, because imposed upon by their own sanguine chimeras, who have a plausibility in their calculations, an earnestness in their arguments, which account for the dupes they daily make in our most sober and wary of civilized communities. Unscrupulous in their means, yet really honest in the belief that their objects can be attained, they are at once the rogues and fanatics of Mammon! This person was held to have been fortunate in some adroit speculations in the corn trade, and he was brought too frequently into business with Mainwaring not to be a frequent visitor at the house. In him, Lucretia saw the very instrument of her design, she led him on to talk of business as a

game—of money as a realizer of cent. per cent.—she drew him into details—she praised him, she admired. In his presence she seemed only to hear him—in his absence, musingly, she started from silence to exclaim on the acuteness of his genius and the accuracy of his figures. Soon the tempter at Mainwaring's heart gave signification to these praises—soon this adventurer became his most intimate friend. Scarcely knowing why, never ascribing the change to her sister, poor Susan wept, amazed at Mainwaring's transformation—no care now for the new books from London, or the roses in the garden!—the music on the instrument was unheeded! Books, roses, music!—what are those trifles to a man thinking upon cent. per cent.? Mainwaring's very countenance altered—it lost its frank, affectionate beauty;—sullen, abstracted, morose—it showed that some great care was at the core. Then Lucretia herself began, grievously to notice the change to Susan—gradually she altered her tone with regard to the speculator, and hinted vague fears, and urged Susan to remonstrance and warning. As she anticipated, warning and remonstrance came in vain to the

man, who, comparing Lucretia's mental power to Susan's, had learned to despise the unlearned timid sense of the last.

It is unnecessary to trace this change in Mainwaring, step by step, or to measure the time which sufficed to dazzle his reason and blind his honour. In the midst of schemes and hopes, which the lust of gold now pervaded, came a thunderbolt. An anonymous letter to the head partner of the bank, provoked suspicions that led to minute examination of the accounts. It seemed that sums had been irregularly advanced (upon bills drawn upon men of straw) to the speculator by Mainwaring; and the destination of these sums could be traced to gambling operations in trade, in which Mainwaring had a private interest and partnership. So great, as we have said, had been the confidence placed in William's abilities and honour, that the facilities afforded him, in the disposal of the joint stock, far exceeded those usually granted to the partner of a firm, and the breach of trust appeared the more flagrant from the extent of the confidence misplaced. Meanwhile, William Mainwaring, though

as yet unconscious of the proceedings of his partners, was gnawed by anxiety and remorse, not-unmixed with hope. He depended upon the result of a bold speculation in the purchase of shares in a Canal Company, a bill for which was then before Parliament, with (as he was led to believe) a certainty of success. The sums he had, on his own responsibility, abstracted from the joint account were devoted to this adventure. But to do him justice, he never dreamed of appropriating the profits anticipated, to himself. Though knowing that the bills, on which the monies had been advanced, were merely nominal deposits, he had confidently calculated on the certainty of success for the speculations, to which the proceeds so obtained were devoted, and he looked forward to the moment when he might avow what he had done, and justify it by doubling the capital withdrawn. But to his inconceivable horror, the bill of the Canal Company was rejected in the Lords—the shares bought at a premium went down to zero; and, to add to his perplexity, the speculator abruptly disappeared from the town. In this crisis, he was summoned to meet his indignant associates.

The evidence against him was morally damning, if not legally conclusive. The unhappy man heard all in the silence of despair. Crushed and bewildered, he attempted no defence. He asked but an hour to sum up the losses of the bank, and his own; they amounted within a few hundreds to the ten thousand pounds he had brought to the firm, and which, in the absence of marriage-settlements, was entirely at his own disposal. This sum he at once resigned to his associates, on condition that they should defray from it his personal liabilities. The money thus repaid, his partners naturally relinquished all further inquiry. They were moved by pity for one so gifted and so fallen—they even offered him a subordinate, but lucrative situation, in the firm in which he had been partner; but Mainwaring wanted the patience and resolution to work back the redemption of his name—perhaps, ultimately, of his fortunes. In the fatal anguish of his shame and despair, he fled from the town, his flight confirmed for ever the rumours against him—rumours worse than the reality. It was long before he even admitted Susan to

the knowledge of the obscure refuge he had sought ; there, at length, she joined him. Meanwhile, what did Lucretia ?—she sold nearly half of her own fortune, constituted principally of the moiety of her portion, which, at Dalibard's death, had passed to herself as survivor, and partly of the share in her deceased husband's effects, which the French law awarded to her ; and with the proceeds of this sum she purchased an annuity for her victims ! Was this strange generosity the act of mercy—the result of repentance ? No ; it was one of the not least subtle and delicious refinements of her revenge. To know him who had rejected her—the rival who had supplanted—the miserable pensioners of her bounty, was dear to her haughty and disdainful hate. The lust of power, ever stronger in her than avarice, more than reconciled her to the sacrifice of gold ;—yes, here, she, the despised, the degraded—had power still ;—her wrath had ruined the fortunes of her victim, blasted the repute, embittered and desolated evermore the future,—now her contemptuous charity fed the wretched lives that she spared in scorn. She had no small diffi-

culty, it is true, in persuading Susan to accept this sacrifice ; and she did so only by sustaining her sister's belief, that the past yet could be retrieved—that Mainwaring's energies could yet rebuild their fortunes,—and that as the annuity was at any time redeemable, the aid therefore was only temporary. With this understanding, Susan, overwhelmed with gratitude, weeping, and broken-hearted, departed to join the choice of her youth. As the men, deputed by the auctioneer to arrange and ticket the furniture for sale, entered the desolate house, Lucretia then, with the step of a conqueror, passed from the threshold.

“ Ah,” she murmured, as she paused, and gazed on the walls—“ ah, they were happy when I first entered those doors !—happy in each other's tranquil love—happier still, when they deemed I had forgiven the wrong, and abjured the past ! How honoured was then their home ! How knew I then, for the first time, what the home of love can be ? And who had destroyed for me, upon all the earth, a home like theirs ?—they on whom that home smiled with its serene and taunting peace !—I—I, the guest !—I—I, the abandoned !

—the betrayed!—what dark memories were on my soul!—what a hell boiled within my bosom!—Well might those memories take each a voice to accuse them!—well, from that hell, might rise the Alecto! Their lives were in my power!—my fatal dowry at my command—rapid death, or slow consuming torture;—but to have seen each cheer the other to the grave, lighting every downward step with the eyes of love—vengeance, so urged, would have fallen only on myself! Ha! deceiver, didst thou plume thyself, forsooth, on spotless reputation?—didst thou stand, *me* by thy side, amongst thy perjured household gods, and talk of honour? Thy home—it is reft from thee!—thy reputation, it is a scoff—thine honour, it is a ghost that shall haunt thee! Thy love—can it linger yet?—Shall the soft eyes of thy wife not burn into thy heart, and shame turn love into loathing? Wrecks of my vengeance—minions of my bounty—I did well to let ye live! I shake the dust from my feet on your threshold;—live on—homeless, hopeless, and childless! The curse is fulfilled!”

From that hour, Lucretia never paused from her

career to inquire further of her victims ;—she never entered into communication with either. They knew not her address, nor her fate, nor she theirs. As she had reckoned, Mainwaring made no effort to recover himself from his fall. All the high objects that had lured his ambition, were gone from him evermore. No place in the state, no authority in the senate, awaits in England the man with a blighted name. For the lesser objects of life, he had no heart, and no care. They lived in obscurity in a small village in Cornwall, till the Peace allowed them to remove to France. The rest of their fate is known.

Meanwhile, Lucretia removed to one of those smaller Londons—resorts of pleasure and idleness, with which rich England abounds, and in which widows of limited income can make poverty seem least plebeian. And now, to all those passions that had hitherto raged within her, a dismal apathy succeeded. It was the great calm in her sea of life. The winds fell, and the sails drooped. Her vengeance satisfied, that, which she had made so preternaturally the main object of existence, once fulfilled, left her in youth objectless.

She strove at first to take pleasure in the society of the place, but its frivolities and pettiness of purpose soon wearied that masculine and grasping mind, already made insensible to the often healthful, often innocent, excitement of trifles, by the terrible ordeal it had passed. Can the touch of the hand, scorched by the burning iron, feel pleasure in the softness of silk, or the light down of the cygnet's plume? She next sought such relief as study could afford; and her natural bent of thought, and her desire to vindicate her deeds to herself, plunged her into the fathomless abyss of metaphysical inquiry, with the hope to confirm into positive assurance her earlier scepticism—with the atheist's hope to annihilate the soul, and banish the presiding God. But no voice that could satisfy her reason came from those dreary deeps: contradiction on contradiction met her in the maze. Only when, wearied with booklore, she turned her eyes to the visible nature, and beheld everywhere harmony, order, system, contrivance, art, did she start with the amaze and awe of instinctive conviction; and the natural religion revolted from her cheerless ethics! Then,

came one of those sudden reactions common with strong passions and exploring minds—but more common with women, however manlike, than with men. Had she lived in Italy then, she had become a nun! For in this woman, unlike Varney and Dalibard, the conscience could never be utterly silenced. In her choice of evil, she found only torture to her spirit in all the respites afforded to the occupations it indulged. When employed upon ill, remorse gave way to the zest of scheming; when the ill was done, remorse came with the repose.

It was in this peculiar period of her life that Lucretia, turning everywhere, and desperately, for escape from the past, became acquainted with some members of one of the most rigid of the sects of dissent. At first, she permitted herself to know and commune with these persons from a kind of contemptuous curiosity; she desired to encourage, in contemplating them, her experience of the follies of human nature; but in that crisis of her mind, in those struggles of her reason, whatever showed that which she yearned most to discover—viz., earnest faith, rooted and

genuine conviction, whether of annihilation or of immortality—a philosophy that might reconcile her to crime by destroying the providence of good, or a creed that could hold out the hope of redeeming the past, and exorcising sin by the mystery of a Divine sacrifice,—had over her a power which she had not imagined or divined. Gradually the intense convictions of her new associates disturbed and infected her. Their affirmations, that as we are born in wrath, so sin is our second nature, our mysterious heritage, seemed, to her understanding, willing to be blinded, to imply excuses for her past misdeeds. Their assurances that the worst sinner may become the most earnest saint—that through but one act of the will, resolute faith, all redemption is to be found,—these affirmations and these assurances, which have so often restored the guilty, and remodelled the human heart, made a salutary, if brief, impression upon her. Nor were the lives of these dissenters, for the most part, austere moral, nor the peace and self-complacency which they evidently found in the satisfaction of conscience and fulfilment of duty, without an influence over her, that, for awhile, both chastened and soothed.

Hopeful of such a convert, the good teachers strove hard to confirm the seeds, springing up from the granite and amidst the weeds; and amongst them came one man more eloquent, more seductive than the rest, Alfred Braddell. This person, a trader at Liverpool, was one of those strange living paradoxes that can rarely be found out of a commercial community. He himself had been a convert to the sect, and like most converts, he pushed his enthusiasm into the bigotry of the zealot. He saw no salvation out of the pale into which he had entered; but though his belief was sincere, it did not genially operate on his practical life; with the most scrupulous attention to forms, he had the worldliness and cunning of the carnal. He had abjured the vices of the softer senses, but not that which so seldom wars on the decorums of outer life. He was essentially a money-maker—close, acute, keen, over-reaching. Good works with him were indeed as nothing—faith, the all in all: He was one of the elect, and could not fall. Still in this man there was all the intensity which often characterizes a mind in proportion to the narrow-

ness of its compass ; that intensity gave fire to his gloomy eloquence, and strength to his obstinate will. He saw Lucretia, and his zeal for her conversion soon expanded into love for her person, yet that love was secondary to his covetousness. Though ostensibly in a flourishing business, he was greatly distressed for money to carry on operations which swelled beyond the reach of his capital ; his fingers itched for the sum which Lucretia had still at her disposal : But the seeming sincerity of the man, the persuasion of his goodness, his reputation for sanctity, deceived her ; she believed herself honestly and ardently beloved, and by one who could guide her back, if not to happiness, at least to repose. She herself loved him not, she could love no more. But it seemed to her a luxury to find some one she could trust, she could honour. If you had probed into the recesses of her mind at that time, you would have found that no religious belief was there settled—only the desperate *wish* to believe—only the disturbance of all previous infidelity—only a restless gnawing desire to escape from memory, to emerge from the gulf. In this

troubled, impatient, disorder of mind and feeling, she hurried into a second marriage as fatal as the first.

For awhile she bore patiently all the privations of that ascetic household; assisted in all those external formalities, centered all her intellect within that iron range of existence. But no grace descended on her soul—no warm ray unlocked the ice of the well. Then, gradually becoming aware of the niggardly meannesses, of the harsh, uncharitable judgments, of the decorous frauds, that, with unconscious hypocrisy, her husband concealed beneath the robes of sanctity, a weary disgust stole over her; it stole, it deepened, it increased;—it became intolerable, when she discovered that Braddell had knowingly deceived her as to his worldly substance. In that mood into which she had rushed into these ominous nuptials, she had had no thought for vulgar advantages; had Braddell been a beggar, she had married him as rashly. But he, with the inability to comprehend a nature like hers—dim not more to her terrible vices than to the sinister grandeur which made their ordinary atmosphere—had descended

cunningly to address the avarice he thought as potent in others as himself, to enlarge on the worldly prosperity with which Providence had blessed him; and now she saw that her dowry alone had saved the crippled trader from the bankrupt list. With this revolting discovery, with the scorn it produced, vanished all Lucretia's unstable visions of reform. She saw this man a saint amongst his tribe, and would not believe in the virtues of his brethren, great and unquestionable as they might have been proved to a more dispassionate and humble inquirer. The imposture she detected, she deemed universal in the circle in which she dwelt; and Satan once more smiled upon the subject he regained. Lucretia became a mother—but their child formed no endearing tie between the ill-assorted pair; it rather embittered their discord. Dimly, even then, as she bent over the cradle, that vision which now, in the old house at Brompton, haunted her dreams, and beckoned her over seas of blood into the fancied future—was foreshadowed in the face of her infant son. To be born again in that birth—to live only in that life—to aspire

as man may aspire, in that future man whom she would train to knowledge and lead to power,—these were the feelings with which that sombre mother gazed upon her babe. The idea that the low-born, grovelling father had the sole right over that son's destiny, had the authority to cabin his mind in the walls of form, bind him down to the sordid apprenticeship, debased, not dignified, by the solemn mien, roused her indignant wrath,—she sickened when Braddell touched her child. All her pride of intellect, that had never slept—all her pride of birth, long dormant, woke up to protect the heir of her ambition, the descendant of her race, from the defilement of the father's nurture. Not long after her confinement, she formed a plan for escape—she disappeared from the house with her child. Taking refuge in a cottage, living on the sale of the few jewels she possessed, she was for some weeks almost happy. But Braddell, less grieved by the loss than shocked by the scandal, was indefatigable in his researches—he discovered her retreat. The scene between them was terrible. There was no resisting the power which all civilized laws give to the rights of hus-

band and father. Before this man, whom she scorned so unutterably, Lucretia was impotent. Then, all the boiling passions long suppressed beneath that command of temper, which she owed both to habitual simulation and intense disdain, rushed forth. Then, she appalled the impostor with her indignant denunciations of his hypocrisy, his meanness, and his guile. Then, throwing off the mask she had worn, she hurled her anathema on his sect, on his faith, with the same breath that smote his conscience and left it wordless. She shocked all the notions he sincerely entertained, and he stood awed by accusations from a blasphemer whom he dared not rebuke. His rage broke at length from his awe. Stung, maddened by the scorn of himself, his blood fired into juster indignation by her scoff at his creed, he lost all self-possession, and struck her to the ground. In the midst of shame and dread at disclosure of his violence, which succeeded the act so provoked, he was not less relieved than amazed when Lucretia, rising slowly, laid her hand gently on his arm, and said, "Repent not, it is past; fear not, I will be

silent! Come, you are the stronger—you prevail. I will follow my child to your home.”

In this unexpected submission in one so imperious, Braddell's imperfect comprehension of character saw but fear, and his stupidity exulted in his triumph. Lucretia returned with him. A few days afterwards, Braddell became ill; the illness increased,—slow, gradual, wearing. It broke his spirit with his health; and then the steadfast imperiousness of Lucretia's stern will ruled and subjugated him. He cowered beneath her haughty, searching gaze, he shivered at her sidelong, malignant glance; but with this fear came necessarily hate; and this hate, sometimes sufficing to vanquish the fear, spitefully evinced itself in thwarting her legitimate control over her infant. He would have it (though he had little real love for children) constantly with him, and affected to contradict all her own orders to the servants, in the sphere in which mothers arrogate most the right. Only on these occasions sometimes would Lucretia lose her grim self-control, and threaten that her child yet should be emancipated from his hands, —should yet be taught the scorn for hypocrites,

which he had taught herself. These words sank deep not only in the resentment, but in the conscience of the husband. Meanwhile, Lucretia scrupled not to evince her disdain of Braddell, by markedly abstaining from all the ceremonies she had before so rigidly observed. The sect grew scandalized. Braddell did not abstain from making known his causes of complaint. The haughty, imperious woman was condemned in the community, and hated in the household.

It was at this time that Walter Ardworth, who was then striving to eke out his means by political lectures (which at the earlier part of the century found ready audience) in our great towns, came to Liverpool. Braddell and Ardworth had been schoolfellows, and even at school, embryo politicians of congenial notions; and the conversion of the former to one of the sects which had grown out of the old creeds, that, under Cromwell, had broken the sceptre of the son of Belial, and established the Commonwealth of Saints, had only strengthened the republican tenets of the sour fanatic. Ardworth called on Braddell, and was startled to find in his school-

fellow's wife, the niece of his benefactor, Sir Miles St. John. Now, Lucretia had never divulged her true parentage to her husband. In an union so much beneath her birth, she had desired to conceal from all her connexions—the fall of the once-honoured heiress. She had descended, in search of peace, to obscurity; but her pride revolted from the thought, that her low-born husband might boast of her connexions, and parade her descent to his level. Fortunately, as she thought, she received Ardworth before he was admitted to her husband, who now, growing feebler and feebler, usually kept his room. She stooped to beseech Ardworth not to reveal her secret, and he, comprehending her pride, as a man well born himself, and pitying her pain, readily gave his promise. At the first interview, Braddell evinced no pleasure in the sight of his old schoolfellow. It was natural enough that one so precise should be somewhat revolted by one so careless of all form. But when, Lucretia imprudently evinced satisfaction at his surly remarks on his visitor—when he perceived that it would please her, that he should not cultivate the

acquaintance offered him, he was moved by the spirit of contradiction, and the spiteful delight even in frivolous annoyance, to conciliate and court the intimacy he had at first disdained ; and then, by degrees, sympathy in political matters, and old recollections of sportive, careless boyhood, cemented the intimacy into a more familiar bond than the sectarian had contracted really with any of his late associates.

Lucretia regarded this growing friendship with great uneasiness—the uneasiness increased to alarm, when one day, in the presence of Ardworth, Braddell, writhing with a sudden spasm, said—"I cannot account for these strange seizures—I think verily I am poisoned!"—and his dull eye rested on Lucretia's pallid brow. She was unusually thoughtful for some days after this remark, and one morning she informed her husband, that she had received the intelligence that a relation, from whom she had pecuniary expectations, was dangerously ill; and requested his permission to visit this sick kinsman, who dwelt in a distant county. Braddell's eyes brightened at the thought of her absence ; with little further questioning he con-

sented; and Lucretia, sure perhaps that the barb was in the side of her victim, and reckoning, it may be, on greater freedom from suspicion, if her husband died in her absence, left the house. It was, indeed, to the neighbourhood of her kindred that she went. In a private conversation with Ardworth, when questioning him of his news of the present possessor of Laughton, he had informed her, that he had heard accidentally, that Vernon's two sons (Percival was not then born) were sickly; and she went into Hampshire, secretly and unknown, to see what were really the chances that her son might yet become the lord of her lost inheritance.

During this absence, Braddell, now gloomily aware that his days were numbered, resolved to put into practice the idea long contemplated, and even less favoured by his spite than justified by the genuine convictions of his conscience. Whatever his faults, sincere at least in his religious belief, he might well look with dread to the prospect of the training and education his son would receive from the hands of a mother, who had blasphemed his sect, and openly pro-

claimed her infidelity. By will, it is true, he might create a trust, and appoint guardians to his child. But to have lived under the same roof with his wife—nay, to have carried her back to that roof, when she had left it, afforded tacit evidence that whatever the disagreement between them, her conduct could hardly have merited her exclusion from the privileges of a mother. The guardianship might therefore avail little to frustrate Lucretia's indirect contamination, if not her positive control. Besides, where guardians are appointed, money must be left; and Braddell knew that at his death his assets would be found insufficient for his debts. Who would be guardian to a penniless infant? He resolved, therefore, to send his child from his roof, to some place where, if reared humbly, it might at least be brought up in the right faith—some place which might defy the search, and be beyond the perversion, of the unbelieving mother. He looked round, and discovered no instrument for his purpose that seemed so ready as Walter Ardworth. For by this time he had thoroughly excited the pity and touched the heart of that good-natured, easy man. His

representations of the misconduct of Lucretia were the more implicitly believed by one who had always been secretly prepossessed against her—who, admitted to household intimacy, was an eye-witness to her hard indifference to her husband's sufferings—who saw in her very request not to betray her gentle birth, the shame she felt in her election—who regarded with indignation her unfeeling desertion of Braddell in his last moments, and who, besides all this, had some private misfortunes of his own, which made him the more ready listener to themes on the faults of women, and had already, by mutual confidences, opened the hearts of the two antient school-fellows, to each other's complaints and wrongs. The only other confidant in the refuge selected for the child, was a member of the same community as Braddell, who kindly undertook to search for a pious, godly woman, who, upon such pecuniary considerations as Braddell, by robbing his creditors, could afford to bestow, would permanently offer to the poor infant a mother's home and a mother's care. When this woman was found, Braddell confided his child to Ardworth,

with such a sum as he could scrape together for its future maintenance. And to Ardworth, rather than to his fellow-sectarian, this double trust was given, because the latter feared scandal and misrepresentation, if he should be ostensibly mixed up in so equivocal a charge. Poor and embarrassed as Walter Ardworth was, Braddell did not for once misinterpret character when he placed the money in his hands, and this because the characters we have known in transparent boyhood we have known for ever. Ardworth was reckless, and his whole life had been wrecked—his whole nature materially degraded—by the want of common thrift and prudence. His own money slipped through his fingers, and left him surrounded by creditors, whom, rigidly speaking, he thus defrauded; but direct dishonesty was as wholly out of the chapter of his vices, as if he had been a man of the strictest principles and the steadiest honour.

The child was gone—the father died—Lucretia returned, as we have seen in Grabman's letter, to the house of death, to meet suspicion and cold looks, and menial accusations, and an inquest on the dead: But through all this the reft tigress

mourned her stolen whelp. As soon as all evidence against her was proved legally groundless, and she had leave to depart, she searched blindly and frantically for her lost child; but in vain. The utter and penniless destitution in which she was left by her husband's decease, did not suffice to terminate her maddening chace. On foot she wandered from village to village, and begged her way, wherever a false clue misled her steps.

At last, in reluctant despair, she resigned the pursuit, and found herself one day in the midst of the streets of London, half famished, and in rags; and before her suddenly, now grown into vigorous youth—blooming, sleek, and seemingly prosperous—stood Gabriel Varney. By her voice, as she approached and spoke, he recognised his step-mother; and, after a short pause of hesitation, he led her to his home. It is not our purpose (for it is not necessary to those passages of their lives from which we have selected the thread of our tale) to follow these two, thus united, through their general career of spoliation and crime. Birds of prey, they searched in human follies and human errors for their food: sometimes severed, sometimes to-

gether, their interests remained one. Varney profited by the mightier and subtler genius of evil to which he had leashed himself; for, caring little for luxuries, and dead to the softer senses, she abandoned to him readily the larger share of their plunder. Under a variety of names and disguises, through a succession of frauds, some vast and some mean, but chiefly on the Continent, they had pursued their course, eluding all danger, and baffling all law.

Between three and four years before this period, Varney's uncle, the painter, by one of those unexpected caprices of fortune which sometimes find heirs to a *millionnaire* at the weaver's loom or the labourer's plough, had suddenly, by the death of a very distant kinsman, whom he had never seen, come into possession of a small estate, which he sold for 6000*l*. Retiring from his profession, he lived, as comfortably as his shattered constitution permitted, upon the interest of this sum; and he wrote to his nephew, then at Paris, to communicate the good news, and offer the hospitality of his hearth. Varney hastened to London. Shortly afterwards a nurse, recommended as an expe-

rienced, useful person in her profession, by Nicholas Grabman, who, in many a tortuous scheme, had been Gabriel's confederate, was installed in the poor painter's house. From that time, his infirmities increased. He died, as his doctor said, "by abstaining from the stimulants to which his constitution had been so long accustomed;" and Gabriel Varney was summoned to the reading of the will. To his inconceivable disappointment, instead of bequeathing to his nephew the free disposal of his 6000*l.*, that sum was assigned to trustees for the benefit of Gabriel and his children yet unborn: "An inducement," said the poor testator, tenderly, "for the boy to marry and reform!" So that the nephew could only enjoy the interest, and had no control over the capital. The interest of 6000*l.* invested in the Bank of England, was *flocchi, nauci* to the voluptuous spendthrift, Gabriel Varney!

Now, these trustees were selected from the painter's earlier and more respectable associates, who had dropped him, it is true, in his days of beggary and disrepute, but whom the fortune that made him respectable had again conciliated. One of these trustees had lately retired to pass

the remainder of his days at Boulogne;—the other was a hypochondriacal valetudinarian. Neither of them, in short, a man of business. Gabriel was left to draw out the interest of the money, as it became periodically due, at the Bank of England. In a few months, the trustee settled at Boulogne died—the trust, of course lapsed to Mr. Stubmore, the valetudinarian survivor. Soon pinched by extravagances, and emboldened by the character and helpless state of the surviving trustee, Varney forged Mr. Stubmore's signature to an order on the Bank, to sell out such portion of the capital as his wants required. The impunity of one offence, begot courage for others, till the whole was well nigh expended. Upon these sums, Varney had lived very pleasantly, and he saw with a deep sigh the approaching failure of so facile a resource.

In one of the melancholy moods engendered by this reflexion, Varney happened to be in the very town in France in which the Mainwarings, in their later years, had taken refuge, and from which Helen had been removed to the roof of Mr. Fielden. By accident he heard the name, and,

his curiosity leading to further inquiries, learned that Helen was made an heiress by the will of her grandfather. With this knowledge came a thought of the most treacherous, the most miscreant and the vilest crime, that even *he* yet had perpetrated ; so black was it, that for awhile, he absolutely struggled against it. But in guilt there seems ever a Necessity, that urges on step after step—to the last consummation. Varney received a letter to inform him that the last surviving trustee was no more, that the trust was, therefore, now centred in his son and heir, that that gentleman was at present very busy in settling his own affairs, and examining into a very mismanaged property in Devonshire, which had devolved upon him ; but that he hoped in a few months to discharge more efficiently, than his father had done, the duties of trustee, and that some more profitable investment than the Bank of England would probably occur.

This new trustee was known personally to Varney—a contemporary of his own, and, in earlier youth, a pupil to his uncle. But, since then, he had made way in life, and retired from the

Profession of Art. This younger Stubmore, he knew to be a bustling, officious, man of business—somewhat greedy and covetous, but withal somewhat weak of purpose, good-natured in the main, and with a little lukewarm kindness for Gabriel, as a quondam fellow-pupil. That Stubmore would discover the fraud was evident—that he would declare it, for his own sake, was evident also—that the Bank would prosecute—that Varney would be convicted, was no less surely to be apprehended. There was only one chance left to the forger—if he could get into his hands, and in time, before Stubmore's bustling interference, a sum sufficient to replace what had been fraudulently taken—he might easily manage, he thought, to prevent the forgery ever becoming known. Nay, if Stubmore, roused into strict personal investigation, by the new Power of Attorney, which a new investment in the Bank would render necessary, should ascertain what had occurred, his liabilities being now indemnified, and the money replaced, Varney thought he could confidently rely on his *ci-devant* fellow-pupil's assent to wink at the forgery, and hush

up the matter. But this was his only chance. How was the money to be gained? He thought of Helen's fortune, and the last scruple gave way to the imminence of his peril, and the urgency of his fears.

With this decision, he repaired to Lucretia, whose concurrence was necessary to his designs. Long habits of crime had now deepened still more the dark and stern colour of that dread woman's sombre nature. But through all that had ground the humanity from her soul, one human sentiment, fearfully tainted and adulterated as it was, still struggled for life—the memory of the mother. It was by this, her least criminal emotion, that Varney led her to the worst of her crimes. He offered to sell out the remainder of the trust-money by a fresh act of forgery—to devote such proceeds to the search for her lost Vincent; he revived the hopes she had long since gloomily relinquished, till she began to conceive the discovery easy and certain. He then brought before her the prospect of that son's succession to Laughton—but two lives now between him and those broad lands—those two lives,

associated with just cause of revenge!—*two* lives! Lucretia, till then, did not know that Susan had left a child—that a pledge of those nuptials, to which she imputed all her infamy, existed to revive a jealousy never extinguished, appeal to the hate that had grown out of her love. More readily than Varney had anticipated, and with fierce exultation, she fell into his horrible schemes.

Thus had she returned to England, and claimed the guardianship of her niece. Varney engaged a dull house in the suburb, and looking out for a servant, not likely to suspect and betray, found the nurse who had watched over his uncle's last illness; but Lucretia, according to her invariable practice, rejected all menial accomplices—reposed no confidence in the tools of her black deeds. Feigning an infirmity that would mock all suspicion of the hand that mixed the draught, and the step that stole to the slumber, she defied the justice of earth, and stood alone under the omniscience of heaven.

Various considerations had delayed the execution of the atrocious deed so coldly contemplated. Lucretia herself drew back; perhaps more daunted

by conscience than she herself was distinctly aware,—and disguising her scruples in those yet fouler refinements of hoped revenge which her conversations with Varney have betrayed to the reader. The failure of the earlier researches for the lost Vincent, the suspended activity of Stubmore, left the more impatient murderer leisure to make the acquaintance of St. John, steal into the confidence of Helen, and render the Insurances on the life of the latter less open to suspicion than if effected immediately on her entrance into that shamle house, and before she could be supposed to form that affection for her aunt which made probable so tender a forethought. These causes of delay now vanished, the Parcæ closed the abrupt woof, and lifted the impending shears.

Lucretia had long since dropped the name of Braddell. She shrank from proclaiming those second spousals, sullied by the degradation to which they had exposed her, and the suspicions implied on the inquest on her husband, until the hour for acknowledging her son should arrive. She resumed, therefore, the name of Dalibard, and by that we will continue to call her. Nor

was Varney uninfluential in dissuading her from proclaiming her second marriage till occasion necessitated. If the son were discovered, and the proofs of his birth in the keeping of himself and his accomplice, his avarice naturally suggested the expediency of wringing from that son some pledge of adequate reward on succession to an inheritance which they alone could secure to him : out of this fancied fund, not only Grabman, but his employer, was to be paid. The concealment of the identity between Mrs. Braddell and Madame Dalibard might facilitate such an arrangement. This idea Varney locked as yet in his own breast. He did not dare to speak to Lucretia of the bargain he ultimately meditated with her son.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GRABMAN'S ADVENTURES.

THE lackeys in their dress-liveries stood at the porch of Laughton, as the postilions drove rapidly along the road, sweeping through venerable groves tinged with the hues of autumn, up to that stately pile. From the window of the large cumbersome vehicle, which Percival, mindful of Madame Dalibard's infirmity, had hired for her special accommodation, Lucretia looked keenly forth. On the slope of the hill grouped the deer, and below, where the lake gleamed, the swan rested on the wave. Farther on to the left, gaunt and stag-headed, rose, living still, from the depth of the glen, Guy's memorable oak. Coming now in

sight, though at a distance, the grey church tower emerged from the surrounding masses of solemn foliage. Suddenly, the road curves round, and straight before her (the rooks cawing above the turrets, the sun reflected from the vanes) Lucretia gazes on the halls of Laughton. And didst thou not, O Guy's oak, murmur warning from thine oracular hollows? And thou, who sleepest below the church tower, didst thou not turn, Miles St. John, in thy grave, when, with such tender care, the young Lord of Laughton bore that silent guest across his threshold, and with credulous, moistened eyes, welcomed Treason and Murder to his hearth?

There, at the porch, paused Helen, gazing with the rapt eye of the poetess on the broad landscape, chequered by the vast shadows cast from the setting sun. There, too, by her side, lingered Varney, with an artist's eye for the stately scene, till a thought, not of art, changed the face of the earth, and the view without mirrored back the Golgotha of his soul.

Leave them thus—we must hurry on.

One day a traveller stopped his gig at a public-

house in a village in Lancashire. He chucked the rein to the ostler, and in reply to a question what oats should be given to the horse, said—"Hay and water—the beast is on job." Then sauntering to the bar, he called for a glass of raw brandy for himself; and while the host drew the spirit forth from the tap, he asked, carelessly, if, some years ago, a woman of the name of Joplin had not resided in the village.

"It is strange," said the host, musingly.

"What is strange?"

"Why, we have just had a gent. asking the same question. I have only been here nine year come December, but my old ostler was born in the village, and never left it. So the gent. had in the ostler, and he is now gone into the village to pick up what else he can learn."

This intelligence seemed to surprise and displease the traveller. "What the deuce," he muttered, "does Jason mistrust me? Has he set another dog on the scent? Humph!" He drained off his brandy, and sallied forth to confer with the ostler.

"Well, my friend," said Mr. Grabman, for the

traveller was no other than that worthy—"well, so you remember Mrs. Joplin, more than twenty years ago—eh?"

"Yees, I guess; more than twenty years since she left the *Pleck*."*

"Ah, she seems to have been a restless body—she had a child with her?"

"Yees, I moind that."

"And I dare say you heard her say the child was not her own, that she was paid well for it, eh?"

"Noa; my missus did not loike me to chaffer much with neighbour Joplin, for she was but a bad 'un—pretty fease, too. She lived agin the *wogh*† yonder, where you see that gent. coming out."

"Oho! that is the gent. who was asking after Mrs. Joplin?"

"Yes; and he giv' me half-a-croon!" said the clever ostler, holding out his hand.

Mr. Grabman, too thoughtful, too jealous of his rival, to take the hint at that moment, darted off,

* *Pleck*,—Lancashire and Yorkshire, synonym for *place*.

† *Anglice*,—wall.

as fast as his thin legs could carry him, towards the unwelcome interferer in his own business.

Approaching the gentleman—a tall, powerful-looking young man—he somewhat softened his tone, and mechanically touched his hat, as he said—

“What, sir, are you, too, in search of Mrs. Joplin?”

“Sir, I am,” answered the young man, eyeing Grabman deliberately, “and you, I suppose, are the person I have found before me on the same search—first, at Liverpool; next at C——, about fifteen miles from that town; thirdly, at L——; and now we meet here. You have had the start of me. What have you learned?”

Mr. Grabman smiled: “Softly, sir, softly. May I first ask, (since open questioning seems the order of the day,) whether I have the honour to address a brother practitioner—one of the law, sir—one of the law?”

“I am one of the law.”

Mr. Grabman bowed and scowled.

“And may I make bold to ask the name of your client?”

"Certainly, you may ask. Every man has a right to ask what he pleases, in a civil way."

"But you'll not answer? Deep! Oh, I understand! Very good. But I am deep too, sir. You know Mr. Varney, I suppose?"

The gentleman looked surprised. His bushy brows met over his steady, sagacious eyes; but after a moment's pause, the expression of the face cleared up.

"It is as I thought," he said half to himself. "Who else could have had an interest in similar inquiries? Sir," he added, with a quick and decided tone, "you are, doubtless, employed by Mr. Varney on behalf of Madame Dalibard, and in search of evidence connected with the loss of an unhappy infant. I am on the same quest, and for the same end. The interests of your client are mine. Two heads are better than one; let us unite our ingenuity and endeavours."

"And share the *pec*, I suppose?" said Grabman drily, buttoning up his pockets.

"Whatever fee you may expect, you will have, anyhow, whether I assist you or not. I expect no fee—for mine is a personal interest, which I

serve gratuitously; but I can undertake to promise you, on my own part, more than the ordinary professional reward for your co-operation."

"Well, sir," said Grabman, mollified, "you speak very much like a gentleman. My feelings were hurt at first, I own. I am hasty, but I can listen to reason. Will you walk back with me to the house you have just left? and suppose we then turn in and have a chop together, and compare notes."

"Willingly!" answered the tall stranger, and the two inquisitors amicably joined company. The result of their inquiries was not, however, very satisfactory. No one knew whither Mrs. Joplin had gone, though all agreed it was in company with a man of bad character and vagrant habits—all agreed, too, in the vague recollection of the child, and some remembered that it was dressed in clothes finer than would have been natural to an infant legally and filially appertaining to Mrs. Joplin. One old woman remembered, that on her reproaching Mrs. Joplin for some act of great cruelty to the poor babe, she replied that it was not her flesh and blood, and that if she had not expected more than she had got, she

would never have undertaken the charge. On comparing the information gleaned at the previous places of their research, they found an entire agreement as to the character personally borne by Mrs. Joplin. At the village to which their inquiry had been first directed, she was known as a respectable, precise young woman, one of a small congregation of rigid dissenters. She had married a member of the sect, and borne him a child, which died two weeks after birth. She was then seen nursing another infant—though how she came by it, none knew. Shortly, after this, her husband, a journeyman carpenter of good repute, died; but to the surprise of the neighbours, Mrs. Joplin continued to live as comfortably as before, and seemed not to miss the wages of her husband; nay, she rather now, as if before kept back by the prudence of the deceased, launched into a less thrifty mode of life, and a gaiety of dress at variance both with the mourning her recent loss should have imposed, and the austere tenets of her sect. This indecorum excited angry curiosity, and drew down stern remonstrance. Mrs. Joplin, in apparent disgust at this intermeddling

with her affairs, withdrew from the village to a small town, about twenty miles distant, and there set up a shop. But her moral lapse became now confirmed; her life was notoriously abandoned, and her house the resort of all the reprobates of the place. Whether her means began to be exhausted, or the scandal she provoked attracted the notice of the magistrates, and imposed a check on her course, was not very certain, but she sold off her goods suddenly, and was next tracked to the village in which Mr. Grabman met his new coadjutor; and there, though her conduct was less flagrant and her expenses less reckless, she made but a very unfavourable impression, which was confirmed by her flight with an itinerant hawker of the lowest possible character. Seated over their port wine, the two gentlemen compared their experiences, and consulted on the best mode of re-mending the broken thread of their research; when Mr. Grabman said, coolly, "But, after all, I think it most likely that we are not on the right scent. This bantling may not be the one we search for."

"Be not misled by that doubt. To arrive at

the evidence we desire, we must still track this wretched woman."

"You are certain of that?"

"Certain."

"Hem! Did you ever hear of a Mr. Walter Ardworth?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"Why, he can best tell us where to look for the child."

"I am sure he would counsel as I do."

"You know him, then?"

"I do."

"What!—he lives still?"

"I hope so."

"Can you bring me across him?"

"If necessary."

"And that young man, who goes by his name, brought up by Mr. Fielden?——"

"Well, sir?"

"Is he not the son of Mr. Braddell?"

The stranger was silent, and, shading his face with his hand, seemed buried in thought. He then rose, took up his candle, and said quietly—

"Sir, I wish you good evening. I have letters

to write in my own room. I will consider by to-morrow, if you stay till then, whether we can really aid each other farther, or whether we should pursue our researches separately." With these words, he closed the door; and Mr. Grabman remained baffled and bewildered.

However, he too had a letter to write; so, calling for pen, ink, and paper, and a pint of brandy, he indited his complaints and his news to Varney :

"Jason" (he began), "are you playing me false? Have you set another man on the track with a view to bilk me of my promised fee?—Explain, or I throw up the business."

Herewith, Mr. Grabman gave a minute description of the stranger, and related pretty accurately what had passed between that gentleman and himself. He then added the progress of his own inquiries, and renewed, as peremptorily as he dared, his demand for candour and plain dealing. Now, it so happened, that in stumbling up stairs to bed, Mr. Grabman passed the room in which his mysterious fellow-seeker was lodged, and, as is the usage in hostels, a pair of boots stood out-

side the door, to be cleaned betimes in the morning. Though somewhat drunk, Grabman still preserved the rays of his habitual astuteness. A clever, and a natural idea, shot across his brain, illuminating the fumes of the brandy; he stooped, and while one hand on the wall steadied his footing, with the other he fished up a boot, and peering within, saw legibly written—"John Ardworth, Esq., Gray's Inn." At that sight, he felt what a philosopher feels at the sudden elucidation of a troublesome problem. Down stairs again, tottered Grabman, re-opened his letter, and wrote—"P.S.—I have wronged you, Jason, by my suspicions; never mind—*Jubilate!* This interloper, who made me so jealous—who, think you, it is? Why, young Ardworth himself—that is, the lad who goes by such name. Now, is it not clear?—of course, no one else has such interest in learning his birth as the lost child himself—Here he is! If old Ardworth lives (as he says), old Ardworth has set him to work on his own business. But then, that Fielden—rather a puzzler that! Yet, no;—now, I understand—old Ardworth gave the boy to Mrs. Joplin, and took it away from her

again when he went to the parson's. Now, certainly, it may be quite necessary to prove—first, that the boy he took from Mr. Braddell's he gave to Mrs. Joplin; secondly, that the boy he left with Mr. Fielden, was the same that he took again from that woman—therefore, the necessity of finding out Mother Joplin, an essential witness : Q. E. D., Master Jason !”

It was not till the sun had been some hours risen that Mr. Grabman imitated that luminary's example. When he did so, he found, somewhat to his chagrin, that John Ardworth had long been gone. In fact, whatever the motive that had led the latter on the search, he had succeeded in gleaning from Grabman all that that person could communicate, and their interview had inspired him with such disgust of the attorney, and so small an opinion of the value of his co-operation (in which last belief, perhaps, he was mistaken) that he had resolved to continue his inquiries alone, and had already, in his early morning's walk through the village, ascertained that the man with whom Mrs. Joplin had quitted the place, had some time after been sentenced to six months

imprisonment in the county gaol. Possibly the prison authorities might know something to lead to his discovery ; and through him the news of his paramour might be gained.

CHAPTER XX.

BECK'S DISCOVERY.

UNDER the cedar trees, at Laughton, sate that accursed and abhorrent being, who sate there young, impassioned, hopeful, as Lucretia Clavering — under the old cedar trees, which, save that their vast branches cast an imperceptibly broader shade over the mossy sward, the irrevocable winters had left the same. Where, through the nether boughs, the autumn sunbeams came aslant, the windows, enriched by many a haughty scutcheon, shone brightly against the western rays. From the flower-beds in the quaint garden near at hand, the fresh yet tranquil air wafted faint perfumes from the lingering heliotrope and fading rose.

The peacock perched dozingly on the heavy balustrade; the blithe robin hopped busily along the sun-track on the lawn; in the distance the tinkling bells of the flock, the plaining low of some wandering heifer, while, breaking the silence, seemed still to blend with the repose. All images around lent themselves to complete that picture of stately calm, which is the character of those old mansion houses, which owner after owner has loved, and heeded,—leaving to them the graces of antiquity, guarding them from the desolation of decay.

Alone sate Lucretia, under the cedar trees, and her heart made dismal contrast to the noble tranquillity that breathed around. From whatever softening or repentant emotions which the scene of her youth might first have awakened—from whatever of less unholy anguish which memory might have caused, when she first, once more, sate under those remembered boughs, and, as a voice from a former world, some faint whisper of youthful love sighed across the waste and ashes of her devastated soul,—from all such rekindled humanities in the past, she had now, with gloomy power,

wrenched herself away. Crime, such as hers, admits not long the *sentiment* that softens the remorse of gentler error. If there wakes one moment from the past the warning and melancholy ghost, soon from that abyss rises the Fury with the lifted scourge, and hunts on the frantic footsteps towards the future. In the future, the haggard intellect of crime must live ; must involve itself mechanically in webs and meshes, and lose past and present in the welcome atmosphere of darkness.

Thus, while Lucretia sate, and her eyes rested upon the halls of her youth, her mind overleapt the gulf that yet yawned between her and the object on which she was bent. Already, in fancy, that home was hers again ;—its present possessor swept away, the interloping race of Vernon, ending in one of those abrupt lines familiar to genealogists, which branch out busily from the main tree, as if all pith and sap were monopolized by them, continue for a single generation, and then shrink into a printer's bracket, with the formal laconism, 'Died without issue.' Back, then, in the pedigree would turn the eye of some curious

descendant, and see the race continue in the posterity of Lucretia Clavering.

With all her ineffable vices, mere cupidity had not, as we have often seen, been a main characteristic of this fearful woman ; and in her design to endow, by the most determined guilt, her son with the heritage of her ancestors, she had hitherto looked but little to mere mercenary advantages for herself ; but now, in the sight of that venerable and broad domain, a covetousness, absolute in itself, broke forth. Could she have gained it for her own use, rather than her son's, she would have felt a greater zest in her ruthless purpose. She looked upon the scene as a deposed monarch upon his usurped realm ; it was her right. The early sense of possession in that inheritance returned to her. Reluctantly would she even yield her claims to her child. Here, too, in this atmosphere, she tasted once more what had long been lost to her—the luxury of that dignified respect which surrounds the well-born. Here, she ceased to be the suspected adventuress, the friendless outcast, the needy wrestler with hostile fortune, the skulking enemy of the law. She rose at once,

and without effort, to her original state—the honoured daughter of an illustrious house. The homeliest welcome that greeted her from some aged but unforgotten villager, the salutation of homage, the bated breath of humble reverence—even trifles like these were dear to her, and made her the more resolute to retain them. In her calm, relentless, onward vision, she saw herself enshrined in those halls, ruling in the delegated authority of her son, safe evermore from prying suspicion and degrading need, and miserable guilt for miserable objects. Here, but one great crime, and she resumed the majesty of her youth! While thus dwelling on the future, her eye did not even turn from those sunlit towers to the forms below, and more immediately inviting its survey. On the very spot where, at the opening of this tale, sate Sir Miles St. John, sharing his attention between his dogs and his guest,—sate now Helen Mainwaring; against the balustrade, where had lounged Charles Vernon, leant Percival St. John; and in the same place where he had stationed himself that eventful evening, to distort, in his malignant sketch, the features of his father, Gabriel

Varney, with almost the same smile of irony on his lips, was engaged in transferring to his canvas a more faithful likeness of the heir's intended bride. Alas! Helen Mainwaring was sadly altered from the evening in which she first fascinated the heart of her youthful lover! And yet how immeasurably deeper was the love which he now felt! How more and more, as the mere sensual beauty faded, did he grow enamoured and inebriate of the diviner beauty of thought and soul. Helen's countenance, indeed, exhibited comparatively but little of the ravages which the deadly aliment, administered so noiselessly, made upon the frame. The eye, it is true, had sunk, and there was a languid heaviness in its look; but the contour of the cheek was so naturally rounded, and the features so delicately fine, that the fall of the muscles was less evident; and the bright warm hue of the complexion, and the pearly sparkle of the teeth, still gave a fallacious freshness to the aspect. But the form was terribly wasted, and the hands, now lightly crossed on each other, seemed nearly transparent. Out of the infernal variety of the materials at their com-

mand, the poisoners had selected a mixture which works by sustaining perpetual fever; which gives little pain, little suffering, beyond that of lassitude and thirst; which wastes like consumption and yet puzzles the physician by betraying few or none of its ordinary symptoms. Many of the subtlest discoveries of Dalibard were not known to his terrible inheritors—more especially some most marvellous application of noxious gases to the art of death, which inhaled only at night and in sleep, kills rapidly (yet not too suddenly) the victim, and dispenses with all aid from drug and mineral—a secret, it is true, subject to one hindrance, viz.; that it is only in the most intimate household confidence that it can be practised, and that, till within the last three or four inhalations, the continuance has only to be suspended, for the sufferer still to hope recovery. Doubtless, it was some such preparation of the finer chemistry that Lucretia had braved, and escaped by her husband's death.

But in the volume which had fallen into Lucretia's hands, there was enough for temptation the more seductive to a spirit so atrocious, inas-

much as the recipes given were for the counterfeits of natural disease ; they aimed at creating, by artificial means, the maladies that might seem the most commonly incidental to our human infirmities ;—fever, in especial, in all its gradations, from the slow and wasting to the rapid and devouring ; here, too, for more immediate purposes, were the ingredients which strike the heart, produce the *aneurism*, or destroy at once by the sudden spasms of the *angina pectoris* ; here were the prescriptions which teach to simulate the effects of passion and emotion, which send the blood to the brain, call the laugh from delirium, bid the surgeon moralize on the connexion between mind and matter, and warn his listeners of the peril of all abrupt shocks upon the nerves. How probable that the death of that girl should so affect the young blood of that adoring lover ! Eschewing the revealing minerals, and concocted only from vegetable venoms which defy all posthumous examination, and prove the impotence of tests, the science of Murder promised impunity from law. From this arsenal had been drawn the means by which Helen's death

might seem the least suspicious, from its slowness, yet not so slow as to tax too long the ingenious study of the Æsculapian, and with sufficient variety, pause, and freedom from symptoms the most usually fatal, to sustain hope till the close, when some sudden chill, some indiscreet exposure, might be supposed to hurry off the debilitated victim.* And there, in that arsenal, already selected and prepared, was the single potion, which should give to the boy-mourner's pangs, the natural paroxysms of despair, and so sweep into one unsuspected grave the two obstacles between the lands of Laughton and the son in whom Lucretia Clavering's lost rights revived.

Although October was far advanced, the day was as mild and warm as August. But Percival, who had been watching Helen's countenance, with the anxiety of love and fear, now proposed that the sitting should be adjourned. The sun

* Thus Archenholz: quoted by Beckman, History of Inventions, Art. "Secret Poison :"—"In a word, the nobler parts lose their tone, become relaxed and affected, and the lungs particularly, as the most delicate of all, and one of those most employed in the functions of the animal economy. The first illness then carries you off," &c.

was declining, and it was certainly no longer safe for Helen to be exposed to the air without exercise. He proposed that they should walk through the garden, and Helen rising cheerfully, placed her hand on his arm. But she had scarcely descended the steps of the terrace, when she stopped short, and breathed hard and painfully. The spasm was soon over, and, walking slowly on, they passed Lucretia with a brief word or two, and were soon out of sight amongst the cedars.

"Lean more on my arm, Helen," said Percival. "How strange it is, that the change of air has done so little for you, and our country doctor still less! I should feel miserable, indeed, if Simmons, who my mother always considered very clever, did not assure me that there was no ground for alarm—that these symptoms were only nervous. Cheer up, Helen—sweet love, cheer up!"

Helen raised her face, and strove to smile, but the tears stood in her eyes: "It would be hard to die now, Percival!" she said, falteringly.

"To die—oh, Helen! No; we must not stay

here longer—the air is certainly too keen for you. Perhaps your aunt will go to Italy—why not all go there, and seek my mother? And she will nurse you, Helen,—and—and ——” He could not trust his voice farther.

Helen pressed his arm tenderly: “Forgive me, dear Percival—it is but at moments that I feel so despondent—now, again, it is past. Ah, I so long to see your mother! when will you hear from her? Are you not too sanguine?—do you really feel sure she will consent to so lowly a choice?”

“Never doubt her affection—her appreciation of you,” answered Percival, gladly, and hoping that Helen’s natural anxiety might be the latent cause of her dejected spirits: “often when talking of the future, under these very cedars, my mother has said—‘You have no cause to marry for ambition—marry only for your happiness.’ She never had a daughter—in return for all her love, I shall give her that blessing.”

Thus talking, the lovers rambled on till the sun set, and then, returning to the house, they found that Varney and Madame Dalibard had pre-

ceded them. That evening Helen's spirits rose to their natural buoyancy. And Percival's heart was once more set at ease by her silvery laugh.

When, at their usual early hour, the rest of the family retired to sleep, Percival adjourned to his study, to write again, and at length, to Lady Mary and Captain Greville. While thus engaged, his valet entered, to say, that Beck, who had been out since the early morning, in search of a horse that had strayed from one of the pastures, had just returned with the animal, who had wandered nearly as far as Southampton.

"I am glad to hear it," said Percival, abstractedly, and continuing his letter.

The valet still lingered—Percival looked up in surprise.

"If you please, sir, you said you particularly wished to see Beck, when he came back."

"I—oh, true! Tell him to wait. I will speak to him by and by—you need not sit up for me—let Beck attend to the bell."

The valet withdrew. Percival continued his letter, and filled page after page, and sheet after sheet; and when at length the letters, not con-

taining a tithe of what he wished to convey, were brought to a close, he fell into a reverie that lasted till the candles burnt low, and the clock from the turret tolled one. Starting up in surprise at the lapse of time, Percival then, for the first time, remembered Beck, and rung the bell.

The *ci-devant* sweeper, in his smart livery, appeared at the door.

"Beck, my poor fellow, I am ashamed to have kept you waiting so long; but I received a letter this morning which relates to you. Let me see—I left it in my sleeping-room. Follow me up stairs—I have some questions to put to you."

"Nothin' agin my carakter, I hopes, your 'onor," said Beck, timidly.

"Oh, no!"

"Noos of the mattriss, then?" exclaimed Beck, joyfully.

"Nor that either," answered Percival, laughing, as he lighted the chamber candlestick, and ascended the stairs, followed by Beck.

Percival had, indeed, received that morning a

letter which had occasioned him much surprise ; it was from John Ardworth, and ran thus :

“ My dear Percival,—It seems that you have taken into your service a young man known only by the name of Beck. Is he now with you at Laughton ? If so, pray retain him, and suffer him to be in readiness to come to me at a day's notice if wanted, though it is probable enough that I may rather come to you. At present, strange as it may seem to you, I am detained in London by business connected with that important personage. Will you ask him carelessly, as it were, in the meanwhile, the following questions :

“ First : How did he become possessed of a certain child's coral, which he left at the house of one Becky Carruthers, in Cole's-buildings ?

“ Secondly : Is he aware of any mark on his arm—if so, will he describe it ?

“ Thirdly : How long has he known the said Becky Carruthers ?

“ Fourthly : Does he believe her to be honest, and truth-spoken ?

“ Take a memorandum of his answers, and

send it to me. I am pretty well aware of what they are likely to be ; but I desire you to put the questions that I may judge if there be any discrepancy between his statement and that of Mrs. Carruthers. I have much to tell you, and am eager to receive your kind congratulations upon an event that has given me more happiness than the fugitive success of my little book. Tenderest regards to Helen ; and, hoping soon to see you, ever affectionately yours.

“ P. S. Say not a word of the contents of this letter to Madame Dalibard, Helen, or any one except Beck. Caution him to the same discretion. If you can't trust to his silence, send him to town.”

When the post brought this letter, Beck was already gone on his errand, and after puzzling himself with vague conjectures, Percival's mind had been naturally too absorbed with his anxieties for Helen, to recur much to the subject.

Now, refreshing his memory with the contents of the letter, he drew pen and ink before him, put the questions *seriatim*, noted down the answers as desired, and smiling at Beck's frightened curiosity

to know who could possibly care about such matters, and feeling confident (from that very fright) of his discretion, dismissed the groom to his repose.

Now Beck had never been in that part of the house before ; and when he got into the corridor, he became bewildered, and knew not which turn to take—the right or the left. He had no candle with him ; but the moon came clear through a high and wide skylight ; the light, however, gave him no guide. While pausing, much perplexed, and not sure that he should even know again the door of the room he had just quitted, if venturing to apply to his young master for a clue through such a labyrinth, he was inexpressibly startled and appalled by a sudden apparition. A door at one end of the corridor opened noiselessly, and a figure, at first scarcely distinguishable, for it was robed from head to foot in a black, shapeless garb, scarcely giving even the outline of the human form, stole forth. Beck rubbed his eyes, and crept, mechanically, close within the recess of one of the doors that communicated with the passage. The figure advanced a few steps towards him ; and

what words can describe his astonishment, when he beheld thus erect, and in full possession of physical power and motion, the palsied cripple whose chair he had often seen wheeled into the garden, and whose unhappy state was the common topic of comment in the servants' hall. Yes, the moon from above shone full upon that face which never, once seen, could be forgotten. And it seemed more than mortally stern and pale, contrasted with the sable of the strange garb, and beheld by that mournful light. Had a ghost, indeed, risen from the dead, it could scarcely have appalled him more. Madame Dalibard did not see the involuntary spy ; for the recess in which he had crept, was on that side of the wall on which the moon's shadow was cast. With a quick step, she turned into another room, opposite that which she had quitted, the door of which stood ajar, and vanished noiselessly as she had appeared.

It was several minutes, however, before Beck had sufficiently recovered his surprise and dismay to emerge from his hiding-place. When he did so, he made one rush in despair back the way he had come. Luckily, this brought him at once to

the great staircase, and, there, the blood-red stains reflected on the stone floors from the blazoned casements, daunted him little less than the sight at which his hair still bristled. He scarcely drew breath till he had got into his own little crib, in the wing set apart for the stablemen, and then, as by degrees he recovered his self-possession, he continued to brood and ponder over what he had witnessed, with that disposition to interpret appearances for the worst, which his long acquaintance with the impositions of the fraudulent and the disguises of the criminal made natural enough.

From the first, we have seen that Beck had been greatly surprised to recognise as a guest in his master's house, that smart-dressed, moustachioed visitor to Grabman, who had dared to beard the Resurrection-man in his den, and who seemed so fearlessly at home in an abode, where Beck was acute enough to be aware that the honest never entered, unless they were protected by their poverty. He knew the usual clients of Grabman were drawn from that equivocal class, who do not seek to go to law, but to get from law; and as one of these he had naturally set down in his mind the visitor,

of mien and garb so unusually trim and gallant, whom he had lighted up the stairs. Honest as Beck himself was, he had a beggarman's comprehensive charity for less scrupulous outcasts, and would not have thought the worse of Varney for his acquaintance with Grabman, had he not seen him now in the guise of a respectable gentleman. The grateful creature's love for his young benefactor woke his very conscience from its lethargy, and made him shudder, lest the guilt, which before he had regarded with apathy, should win entrance to a home so innocent. St. John's youth, too, and consequent inexperience, inspired him with a compassionate distrust;—so easy to dupe such goodness! Beck had been exceedingly curious to learn all he could in the servants' hall about Varney's proceedings. Mindful of his nurse's sage notions, as to the easy prey which sharpers find in rich young men, he was strongly persuaded that Varney was one of that plausible fraternity; but his penetration was in fault when he found that cards and dice were never introduced; and his fear had been allayed by learning that Varney seemed the particular

confidant and friend of St. John's own kinswoman, Madame Dalibard. But now that very intimacy filled him with terror and suspicion. Coupling together the image of Varney as visitor to Grabman, and the detection of Madame Dalibard as an impostor of that kind most familiar to his experience, a pretended cripple,—he could not but think that some scheme hurtful to his master was in operation; and he remained irresolute whether to confide his suspicions and his discoveries to St. John, or to exert all his vigilance for the confirmation of his surmises. That kind of astute cunning which the abject poor, almost in self-defence, acquire, and which is rather heightened than lessened by the dulness of the nobler faculties, made Beck feel some confidence in the success of the watch which he resolved to institute, while it led him to fear that any premature disclosure to so young a master might only end in his own defeat—perhaps procure his expulsion. He resolved, therefore, to bide his time. So did the grateful affection that adorned this poor creature's nature, lift him for the moment out of himself, that he had clean forgotten what otherwise might well have puzzled his con-

jectures—the letter St. John had received, and the strange questions put to him by his master; but when, at length, he fell into broken and agitated sleep, the visions of all that had successively disturbed him waking, united confusedly, as in one picture of gloom and terror. He thought that he was in his old loft in St. Giles's; that the Grave-stealer was wrestling with Varney for his body, while he himself, lying powerless on his pallet, fancied he should be safe so long as he could retain, as a talisman, his child's coral, which he clasped to his heart. Suddenly, in that black shapeless garb in which he had beheld her, Madame Dalibard bent over him, with her stern colourless face, and wrenched from him his charm. Then ceasing his struggle with his horrible antagonist, Varney laughed aloud, and the Grave-stealer seized him in his deadly arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TAPESTRY CHAMBER.

THE next day, taking advantage of an hour when he knew the family were out of doors, Beck contrived to coax the good-natured valet, who had taken him under his special protection, to show him over the house. He had heard the other servants say there was such a power of fine things, that a peep into the rooms was as good as a show, and the valet felt pride in being *cicerone* even to Beck. After having stared sufficiently at the banquet-hall and the drawing-room, the armour, the busts, and the pictures, and listened, open-mouthed, to his guide's critical observations, Beck was led up the great stairs into the old family

picture-gallery, and into Sir Miles's ancient room at the end, which had been left undisturbed, with the bed still in the angle; on returning thence. Beck found himself in the corridor which communicated with the principal bed-rooms, in which he had lost himself the night before.

"And vot room be that vith the littul vite 'ead h-over the door?" asked Beck, pointing to the chamber from which Madame Dalibard had emerged.

"That white head, Master Beck, is Floorer the goddess; but a heathen like you knows nothing about goddesses. Floorer has a half-moon in her hair, you see, which shows that the idolatrous Turks worship her, for the Turkish flag is a half moon, as I have seen at Constantinople! I have travelled, Master Beck."

"And vot room be it?" persisted Beck.

"Why, the pretty young lady, Miss Mainwaring, has it at present. There is nothing to see in it. But that one, opposite;" and the valet advanced to the door through which Madame Dalibard had disappeared—"that is curious; and as Madame is out, we may just

take a peep." He opened the door gently, and Beck looked in. "This, which is called the turret-chamber, was Madame's when she was a girl, I have heard Old Bessy say; so master pops her there now. For my part, I'd rather sleep in your little crib, than have those great, gruff-looking figures staring at me by the fire-light, and shaking their heads with every wind on a winter's night." And the valet took a pinch of snuff, as he drew Beck's attention to the faded tapestry on the walls. As they spoke, the draught between the door and the window caused the gloomy arras to wave with a life-like motion: and to those more superstitious than romantic, the chamber had certainly no inviting aspect.

"I never sees these old tapestry rooms," said the valet, "without thinking of the story of the lady who, coming from a ball and taking off her jewels, happened to look up, and saw an eye in one of the figures which she felt sure was no peeper in worsted."

"Vot vas it, thin?" asked Beck, timidly lifting up the hangings, and noticing that there was a considerable space between them and the wall,

which was filled up in part by closets and ward-
robes set into the wall, with intervals more than
deep enough for the hiding-place of a man.

“Why,” answered the valet, “it was a thief.
He had come for the jewels ; but the lady had
the presence of mind to say aloud, as if to her-
self, that she had forgotten something, slipped
out of the room, locked the door, called up the
servants, and the thief—who was no less a per-
son than the under-butler—was nabbed.”

“And the French ’oman sleeps ’ere ?” said Beck,
musingly.

“French ’oman ! Master Beck, nothing’s so
vulgar as these nicknames, in a first-rate situa-
tion. It is all very well when one lives with skin-
flints ; but with such a master as our’n, respect’s
the go. Besides, Madame is not a French ’oman ;
she is one of the family—and as old a family it is,
too, as e’er a lord’s in the three kingdoms. But
come, your curiosity is satisfied now, and you
must trot back to your horses.”

As Beck returned to the stables, his mind yet
more misgave him as to the criminal designs of
his master’s visitors. It was from Helen’s room

that the false cripple had walked. Helen, therefore, must, no doubt, be aware of the imposture. Now, the state of Percival's heart could be no secret in the servants' hall ; and while the men united in praise of his supposed selection, the women thought it would be a great catch, indeed, for the young lady. That St. John, in some way or other, was duped and deceived by the whole party, was now Beck's natural conviction. But how could he, as he had hoped, frustrate their designs?—the poor stable-man, who only by chance ever gained access to the part of the house inhabited by its heads, and who, rarely even, unless expressly sent for, came in sight of Percival himself?

The day passed without any other noticeable occurrence. The Doctor called, saw Helen, slightly altered his medicines, (which on the main were in conformity with the prescriptions of the London physcian,) and was still sanguine of success.

At the dead of night, when the house seemed buried in sleep, Beck stole bare-shod from his dormitory, and having now well impressed on his memory the way he should take, crept into the

corner of the bed-chamber passage, and, opening the cloth-door at the end, slunk behind it, and there watched. About the same hour as before, he saw the dark undistinguishable form come, this time from Madame Dalibard's own room, enter Helen's, stay there little more than a moment, reappear, and again, dark and silent as a moving cloud, vanish into the same chamber from which it had come.

The brevity of this visit surprised the watcher. What could the aunt have to say, that could be said in so short a time? Satisfied, however, at the result of his vigil, Beck retreated, and regained his own bed in safety.

CHAPTER XXII.

ILLUSTRATIVE EPISTLES.

HELEN MAINWARING TO THE REV. MR. FIELDEN.

DEAR AND HONOURED FRIEND,—Your last letter reached me on the morning I left London ; and I kissed with grateful reverence those affecting and holy passages in which you soothe my wayward and childish melancholy, and encourage my heart in its struggle towards serenity and hope. Yes, indeed, I have many causes for thankfulness to Heaven ; not the least, that in my giddier youth, Heaven gave me its guide in you. How often, when my wild fancy has built up a future, and said, ‘ Such shall be my home,’—how often, though I told not even to you my dreams, have you by soft, un-

expected words, led me into surer paths, and given my soul a loftier impulse. ‘Not on earth, canst thou lay out the future—not in time, canst thou erect a Home!’—so, listening to you, my heart would whisper, and, calming back from its visions, it became still. Then, that which I had called Poetry, and vainly sought to vent in idle fancies, and worthless rhymes, changed its nature and melted into Religion. You know, how the merest forms of our faith affect me—the bell tolling your little flock into the village church—the children’s voices joining in the simple hymn—those homely groupings, scattered amongst the graves after service, till your step came forth, and your smile, fresh from the solemn rite, rested on your humble children! Those sabbaths, how profoundly they impressed me! How sensibly, in those days, I felt beneath my hushed footstep, the bridge between earth and heaven. Such sabbaths I have never known again. When in the great city from which I have now escaped, I went alone to the neighbouring church, I looked in vain for that endearing tie between the pastor and the flock! That cold, unfamiliar audience, that studied, laboured preach-

ing—Ah! here was the form of religion, with you, the soul! That crowd, so vast, so listless in its worship, impressed me with strange pity. How little each knew of the other! To you come at once all the cares, and hopes, and griefs, of your flock; in that little circle each life opens its chronicle to all. How often you shape your discourse to soothe some peculiar sorrow, remove some solitary doubt. But in that unconnected mass, the words fall as snows on the surface of the water, melting as they fall. In that chorus of common prayer, no concord of hearts swells under the lifeless harmony of words. How many, the next Sabbath, might be absent, yet not be missed;—to strangers as well would the cold homily be delivered. Every week, in those careless numbers, Adversity or Death would have found a victim. Beholding that assembly, the congregation within the building seemed to me as an image of all life in the Temple of Creation; Death amidst them, and around, yet hearing, with indifferent ears, the assurances of Immortality above!

“Why do these thoughts return to me now so solemnly and sadly? Because I myself—O,

second Father!—have, like the rest, forgotten too much the insecurity of earthly blessings—because your voice has not been near to awake my heart, when, more wilfully than in childhood, it planned an earthly future, and built a mortal home. Ah, sir! you have read the secret of my heart, though I showed you but the surface; you have guessed what Percival has become to me—how his happiness has grown a part of every thought—how, in his affection, I have smiled on a phantom that flits afar, and murmured—‘There is happiness on earth.’

“How you would love him—not for my sake only—for his own! How you would smile at your own fears, lest I am deceived! Do you know what I love in him? It is the absence of deceit—it is the impossibility to deceive. No, it ‘is no ideal of my own imagination that I behold,’ if, indeed, scarce consciously to myself, such an ideal was formed before I knew him. From my imagination he stands apart. In the visions that dreaming faculty bestows on me I muse alone. Not to him can I explain why I smile the one moment, and could weep the next. It is my heart

that moves humbly to his heart, penetrated by its exquisite goodness, honoured by its noble trust. I cannot reveal to him my dim and idle thoughts; but when some thought climbs the highest, I stand abashed to see it dwarfed, beside some generous deed which springs, as if *without* a thought, from his instinctive simple tendency to beautiful charities, and kindly truths. Then, it seems as if imagination, yearning after Good, before but a shadow, had found in his heart a substance—as if in his power to *act* nobly I had realized my visionary worship for what is noble; for even the highest poetry is but the hymn of high deeds, and all the brightest musings of our fancy are but imperfect reflections of good human actions. Yet there have been moments when I have sighed, seeing his loyal nature spread clear before me, that I cannot render mine as transparent—that little as I have to bestow, there is a something in my mind or heart which I am condemned to withhold. Lately I have felt less remorseful in this thought—felt that in that something, never to be revealed or understood below, there is an omen that my

fate here must rest incomplete. In solitude, at night,—in the rays of the setting sun—in the light of the rising moon, all this untold part of me comes forth—it prevails. Earth fades—the undefined emotion unites me with the infinite—I seem to myself to have shaken off the chains of clay, and my soul blends aloft with spirits. Do you remember once the book that you took from me with a gentle chiding that I had selected it from your shelves without your sanction—*The Lives of the elder Saints*? You bade me beware of the diseased enthusiasm which those descriptions might create in a heated fancy!—Alas, your warning was perhaps prophetic! otherwise why do such trance and reverie come, at bright hours, to one so humble, so erring as your Helen? See, from what I have thus written, my state of mind!—curb it where wandering, strengthen it where weak, admonish it where repining, beloved monitor!

“ You question me of my aunt, of her manner, her habits. What can I say to you? To me she is always the same—I can win no way in her affections. But do not think she is unkind, much

less harsh—she is only distant. I contemplate her with a certain compassionate awe. She seems to me like some solitary exile on a desert island. The sails of life pass to and fro along the sea, but they provoke the exile to no desire of escape. —She seems rooted in her desolation, and to sway it like a realm. Yet, when I hear her converse with others, (with me she never *converses*,) it is as if the world, and the world only, filled up those sombre musings. A knowledge, immense but dreary, drawn both from books and life, informs her chilling sentences with what would seem wisdom, if it were not scorn. Her experience, so vented, crushes me as a load ; never from its iron stores breaks forth a hope or a belief. How, with such sufferings and such stern despondency in the presence of good below, she can be thus austere patient and resigned—how she never flies to faith in joy and virtue—faith in some being or principle without her own dismal existence, amazes me, as at a strength not given to mortals ; for are we not left weak in the presence of pain and grief, purposely that we may know, in the sense of our own mortality, that grief and pain, with ourselves, are

perishable ;—and so draw from our veriest infirmities our surest comfort? But while awed before her—I love, oh, so tenderly, this poor, haughty, lonely one !—I have lately felt a calm but sad pleasure in the thought, that if life is not long spared to me, she will know how I loved and pitied her, when I am no more. I have sought to repay to her, even by my death, the kindness she showed my parents. And then, perhaps, her heart will soften to the orphan she protected without loving, and she will own that gratitude still dwells on earth !

The only being to whom my aunt ever seems to warm, is my cousin. I see her eyes sparkle when he enters. Her voice grows subdued when she welcomes him: And she is so proud of his genius ! He has, no doubt, told you of his late brilliant success. His book is always in reach of my aunt's hand ; yet it seems to me strange that, considering her scorn of the world's opinion, she exults more in the fame the work has won, than in the merits of the work itself. Of those I am no judge—what know I of the anxious questions which men debate ? All that I can comprehend

are peace, and love, and beauty. But when amidst pages that appeal in vain to my feeble reason—some thought, warm with lofty hope and benevolent aspiration glows forth, oh! then my eyes are suffused with sweet tears—and I, too, grow proud in my dear cousin's fame. In him,—I am sometimes startled to think—in him, my imagination lives more than in my noble Percival. He attracts towards himself that mystic part of my being—I unite my fancies, poor visionary that I am, with his genius—his career. How I wish I were his sister, or that I had a sister, whose fate was bound up in his—to smile on him through his rough ordeal, bear with him, his hard privations; listen to his hopes—and share in the triumph—that I know (as by an unmistakable intuition) his destinies must command! So sometimes, as if there were two separate beings within me,—while my heart is at home with Percival, calm, faithful, and content, my unquiet thought wanders abroad with Ardworth; and only in prayer I unite them both! But I am at Laughton, which you remember, and have often described to me, by our fireside, or in our village rambles!

Ah, if ever indeed this be my home, how I shall long to welcome you here, and learn from your own lips how sweet duties may be best fulfilled ! It is natural that this place should have grown into my love, as if it were a living thing. If Percival's home were the rudest cottage, it would be the same. It is not, you well know, that the old mansion is grander than your little Helen ever found before, out of her fairy tales—but that here there is a link itself, between the mansion and the cottage. Percival's whole thought seems to make those around him happy—to relieve the sharpness of the contrast between poverty and wealth, toil and ease. It seems as if, could you destroy the mansion, you would invade the cottage. No penury is visible here ; one home is humbler than another, but each owner seems equally to have what he has been bred and nurtured to value most. And there is an intimacy far beyond mere condescension and respect, which unites all that dwell in this happy place. We enter some cottage and talk with its owners, as if at home. Every want is told as to a friend. Percival's wealth seems but a trust held for the common use.

Hence a kind of religion breathes around me—and good is the atmosphere of the place. His mother—they so love her! Ah, will that mother be ever mine! What have I done to merit such a lot? That thought alone would disquiet me with humble doubt in so blest a future:—My beloved guardian, do not chide me, if I own, that, struggle as I will to obey you, and chase those forebodings which you rebuke, from my mind,—they *will* return—they *will* haunt me! If under your roof, when my health was so unbroken,—when the cold never seemed to chill, nor the heat to fever—my eyes in the burst of spring would wander from the budding leaves, and the dawning flowers—to rest upon that spot on the landscape, where, amidst the gloomy evergreens, rose the distant graves—if, even then, no talk, no book, no theme was so cherished, as those which transported the idea beyond the tomb;—and my heart fled to the dark bourne as a bird to its nest;—if even then such were the impulses that I could not control, is it so strange that they should move me now? For truly it is a strange disease that has fastened upon me. I suffer little pain. I can detail no precise

complaint, but strength and life are ebbing from me, day by day. Well, if it must be so—if the foreboding I cannot check, be but the heavenly summons,—kindly meant to detach the chains that bind me too much to the earth, I am doomed to leave—let me die, at least, with all my life of life undestroyed; before my errors have made me one foe, before one grief has weakened my trust in God, or one deceit my belief in human hearts!—loving all things, let me fade into the source of love! Above, perhaps, what here dwells within me incomplete, may find development and scope—and my own soul, now dim and troubled, grow clear to me, in the smile of God. To our reunion—if I go before you, to your reunion, O my earthly father.

HELEN.

LETTER FROM JOHN ARDWORTH TO THE REV.

M. FIELDEN.

When, dear friend and tutor—in my moody and fretful boyhood—you bade me, reluctantly, lay aside Newton and Thucydides, and walk out

with you—when, making me observe, in the great system of Nature, how all things waited their allotted time—how the withered herbage tarried for the spring, and the blade of corn for the autumn harvest, you impressed on me the law of PATIENCE—you little knew, perhaps, the ungracious soil on which the lesson was imprinted, or how much the impetuous rebellion within me resisted the curb imposed. When, growing older and more sensible of those Eleusinia that lurk under the plain doctrines of Christian faith, you explained to me how wonderfully harmonious to the systems which pervade the universe are the injunctions of that religion so unspeakably wise—how in what seem at first but duties to God, in obedience to direct commands, dwells a philosophy best adapted to educate mind to the utmost, and mature all the nobler faculties;—how in *faith*, as an essential habit of the reverent intellect, we keep alive, through all the deceits and disappointments of life, belief not only in a divine future, but in the inherent good and improveability of men, who with us are destined to that future; and so, still linking us with our fellows, make our

efforts cheerful, give impetus to our powers, and practical goals to our ambition ;—how, in *patience* under trial and suffering, we purge our passions of their delusions, and silently complete the manhood within us by its hardy and hopeful war with adverse fortune ;—even then you little guessed how reluctantly I admitted your arguments and yielded to their truth. But, Heaven be praised, the lessons took root at last. If my dreams of the future ever are fulfilled, I owe it to those precepts which warmed Stoicism into Christianity, and gave more than the authority of Epictetus to the twofold aphorism—“Bear and forbear !”

Since I wrote last, I have known two great trials—a success for the intellect, a woe for the heart. I have applied to earthly practice the two divine tenets, and I have come at last calm through both. More strong, if more sad, I go on, up the hill of my career. And at the moment when perhaps my footstep was least steady, a great good has befallen me. Mists that for an instant bewildered me, have vanished from the past. Knowing now what and who I am, I can measure better the path to what I would be.

Amongst my late trials, one thought that perhaps excited me to that convulsive and erratic effort which has given an episode of crude celebrity to the sterner epic, which the life of a man, seeking true distinction and utility, should be—one thought that most excited and unsettled, rose from the doubt which your written narrative respecting my birth naturally instilled. Was I at once fatherless and *nameless*?—one of those outcasts from the pale of Law whom I, myself a lawyer, was taught by all artifice to exclude? That doubt has vanished. Long and painful is the history you will hear from my lips, or another's, from whom the tale more appropriately may come. As soon as I have completed a certain mission that I have undertaken, I will come to your quiet roof, and, as in the old days, when after bewildering my convictions by the jargon of metaphysical speculations, I burst rudely into your little study and cried—"Lay aside your Greek Poets, shut up your Beausobre—Tell me whence idea comes, and what life is?"—so, now again, I will pour out all the late troubles of my breast, happy to be a child at your knees once more !

You ask me meaningly, if I know Percival St. John, and what I think of him? Those questions are so interwoven with your theme of Helen, that you betray at once the secret of your interest. Let your fears cease; Helen has obtained one worthy of her. You know how hard I find it to admire my contemporaries. This Percival, a mere boy, unlearned as he is, I do more than admire—I reverence him. Out of his frank youth shines, like a visible being, manly honour. I strive—I, hard, laborious workman,—after some distant good. He stands before me like good itself! You will know, when we meet, what trust to give to these words from my lips. Yes, he, and he only, is worthy that angel-child. How youth becomes them both! What pity that they should ever grow old! She, with her poet-soul—he, with his human heart—the Psyche and the Eros! No; ambition, and care, and age are not meant for them! Adieu.

Ever your grateful pupil,

JOHN ARDWORTH.

Gray's-Inn, October, 1831.

LETTER FROM GABRIEL VARNEY TO ———.*

DULL living in the country, dear ———; sad waste of the hours which never return! I am quite of young Rapid's philosophy—"Push on, keep moving!"—the better fit for our Steam-carriage, Railway, Company-bubble times! Life, old fellow, is a shuttlecock, brisk and soaring enough when in the full excitement of a brace of battle-dores, but only a cork and a few ragged feathers when it takes a fit of repose! A fine place this, of my friend Percival St. John's! I spent my boyhood here; and dull as it is now, I should not dislike it for a *pied-de-terre*, with half-a-dozen friends like yourself, half-a-dozen lasses like *Celeste*, and wine and dice as our *pis-aller*. But you never saw wealth so thrown away as on this young gentleman! Ah! if that wealth were mine for a year, how the gossips should talk, and the grave bigots shrug up their shoulders! Do you know, ———, I have always been gnawed with

* This letter is addressed to one of Varney's familiar acquaintances, an associate in his more venial vices, but wholly unacquainted with his darker crimes.

the longing to be rich *enough*, though only for a year—to let my desires loose in the space of one of those colossal fortunes, which humble, by contrast, the paltry extravagances of us poor *vauriens* to the dust. Somehow or other, I am always a *millionnaire* in fancy. I run riot in luxuries, when I sit alone smoking my cigar—then comes a d——d dun, and all my wits are set to work to pay for a miserable pair of varnished boots! How can a man's genius grow up lustily in such a cribbed little flowerpot! You must give room to the roots of a sickly orange-tree; but fate never widens the tub in which man's genius is once set! *Apropos*, that cursed wine merchant is insolent—pressing!—call and tell him accidentally that I am hand in glove with young St. John, just coming of age, and with cellars as vast as the catacombs! What the devil are these rich friends good for, if not to prop up one's credit? Don't you miss me in B* * * * St.?—Who consoles little Julie?—By the way, Sophy writes me a sermon. Tell her that I am very much flattered if I have really “broken her heart and ruined her peace.” When a man is past forty, such reproaches

are very complimentary! You set my teeth on edge by your stupid praise of M——'s last article. I am not jealous—not I. But when I know what is in me, and hear boobies like you prate of a sublime picture by Martin, or a brilliant composition by Donizetti, or M——'s wonderful essay in the Edinburgh,—my gorge rises. What a hard lot is mine, ——! At Rome, C——i would stand for hours before my easel. At Berlin, S——g would select me from all the *savans* to discuss metaphysics. Rossini has called me his future successor. And with all these gifts, I stand barren and obscure in this damnable atmosphere of chance and cant. Oh, but they say, "He wants application!" Yes, because I have a gentleman's spirit, and must enjoy life. Application!—merit of blockheads! No, my star shall shine out yet! Mine be the bold, the rapid, the startling inspirations of wit or fortune, no matter which! "The world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open." There's a long letter for you! It has done me good, for I was horribly hipped when I sat down to write. Now I have coaxed myself into thinking of the lost time I shall have to regain when I see

you all once more. What toasts, and what songs, and what dark-eyed glances ! Oh, yes ! all this is *necessary* to me ; and for all this, a still, small voice whispers, “ Money, money, money, Gabriel Varney ! ” Damn it, ——, money we must have, that’s poz !

Tout à vous,

And a fig for the Commander’s statue of stone !

DON JUAN.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE OF MRS. JOPLIN.

ONE day at the hour of noon, the court boasting the tall residence of Mr. Grabman was startled from the quiet usually reigning there at broad daylight, by the appearance of two men, evidently no inhabitants of the place. The squalid, ill-favoured denizens lounging before the doors, stared hard; and, at the fuller view of one of the men, most of them retreated hastily within. Then, in those houses, you might have heard a murmur of consternation and alarm. The ferret was in the burrow—a Bow-strect officer in the court! The two men paused, looked round, and, stopping before the dingy tower-like house, selected the bell which

appealed to the inmates of the ground floor, to the left. At that summons Bill the cracksman imprudently presented a full view of his countenance through his barred window; he drew it back with astonishing celerity; but not in time to escape the eye of the Bow-street runner.

“Open the door, Bill—there’s nothing to fear—I have no summons against you, ’pon honour. You know I never deceive. Why should I? Open the door, I say!”

No answer.

The officer tapped with his cane at the foul window.

“Bill! there’s a gentleman who comes to you for information, and he will pay for it handsomely.”

Bill again appeared at the casement, and peeped forth, very cautiously, through the bars.

“Bless my vitals, Mr. R——! and it is you, is it? What were you saying about ‘paying handsomely?’”

“That your evidence is wanted—not against a pal, man. It will hurt no one, and put at least five guineas in your pocket.”

"Ten guineas!" said the Bow-street officer's companion.

"You be's a man of 'onor, Mr. R——!" said Bill, emphatically; "and I scorns to doubt you—so here goes."

With that, he withdrew from the window, and in another minute or so the door was opened, and Bill, with a superb bow, asked his visitors into his room.

In the interval, leisure had been given to the cracksman to remove all trace of the wonted educational employment of his hopeful children. The urchins were seated on the floor, playing at push-pin; and the Bow-street officer benignly patted a pair of curly heads as he passed them, drew a chair to the table, and, wiping his forehead, sat down, quite at home. Bill then deliberately seated himself, and, unbuttoning his waistcoat, permitted the butt-ends of a brace of pistols to be seen by his guests. Mr. R.'s companion seemed very unmoved by this significant action. He bent one inquiring steady look on the cracksman, which, as Bill afterwards said, went through him 'like a gimblet through a

panny,' and, taking out a purse, through the network of which the sovereigns gleamed pleasantly, placed it on the table, and said :

“ This purse is yours, if you will tell me what has become of a woman named Joplin, with whom you left the village of —, in Lancashire, in the year 18—.”

“ And,” put in Mr. R —, “ the gentleman wants to know, with no view of harming the woman. It will be to her own advantage to inform us where she is.”

“ 'Pon onor, agin ?” said Bill.

“ 'Pon honour !”

“ Well, then, I has a heart in my buzzom, and if so be I can do a good turn to the 'oman wot I has loved—and kep company with,—why not ?”

“ Why not, indeed ?” said Mr. R —. “ And as we want to learn, not only what has become of Mrs. Joplin, but what she did with the child she carried off from —, begin at the beginning, and tell us all you know.”

Bill mused.

“ How much is there in the pus ?”

“ Eighteen sovereigns.”

“ Make it twenty—you nod,—twenty then?—a bargain! Now, I’ll go on right a-head. You sees as how, some months arter we—that is, Peggy Joplin and self, left ——, I was put in quod in Lancaster gaol—so I lost sight of the blowen. When I got out, and came to Lunnon—it was a matter of seven year, afore, all of a sudding, I come bang up agin her—at the corner of Common Garden. ‘Why Bill!’ says she. ‘Why Peggy!’ says I—and we bussed each other like winky. ‘Shall us come together agin?’ says she. ‘Why, no,’ says I—‘I has a wife wots a good un—and gets her bread by setting up as a widder with seven small childern! By-the-bye, Peg, what’s a come of your brat?’—for as you says, Sir, Peg had a child put out to her to nurse. Lor! how she cuffed it! ‘The brat!’ says she, laughing like mad—‘Oh, I got rid o’ that, when you were in jail, Bill.’ ‘As how?’ says I. ‘Why there was a woman begging agin St. Poll’s churchyard—so I purtended to see a frind at a distance—’old the babby a moment,’ says I, puffing and panting—‘while I ketches my friend yonder.’ So she ’olds the brat, and I

never sees it agin;—and there's an ind of the bother!" 'But won't they ever ax for the child—them as giv' it you?' 'Oh no,' says Peg, 'they left it too long for that, and all the tin was a-gone; and one mouth is hard enough to feed in these days!—let by other folks' bantlings.' 'Well,' says I, 'where do you hang out? I'll pop in, in a friendly way.' So she tells me—som'are in Lambeth (I forgets hexackly)—and many's the good piece of work we ha' done togeth'er."

"And where is she now?"—asked Mr. R——'s companion.

"I doesn't know purcisely, but I can com' at her: you see, when my poor wife died, four year com' Chris'mas, and left me with as fine a famuly, tho' I says it, as h-old King Georgy himself walked afore, with his gold-'eaded cane, on the terris at Vindsor—all heights and all h-ages, to the babby in arms (for the littel un there warn't above a year old, and had been a-brought up upon spoon-meat, with a dash o' blue-ruin to make him slim and ginteel;) as for the bigger uns wot you don't see, they be doin' well in forin parts, Mr. R——!"

Mr. R—— smiled, significantly.

Bill resumed. "Where was I? Oh, when my wife died, I wanted sum un to take care of the childern, so I takes Peg into the 'ous. But Lor! how she larruped 'em — she has a cruel heart—hasn't she, Bob? Bob is a cute child, Mr. R——. Just as I was a-thinking of turning her out neck an' crop, a gemman what lodges aloft, wot be a laryer, and wot had just saved my nick, Mr. R——, by proving a h-alibi, said 'That's a tidy body, your Peg!' (for you see he was often a wisiting here, an' h-indeed, sin' thin, he has taken our third floor, No. 9) 'I've bin a speakin' to her, and I find she has been a nus to the sick. I has a frind wot's a h-uncle that's ill, can you spare her, Bill, to attind him?' 'That I can,' says I, 'anything to obleedge.' So Peg packs off—bag and baggidge."

"And what was the sick gentleman's name?" asked Mr. R.'s companion.

"It was one Mr. Warney—a painter, wot lived at Clap'am. Since thin I've lost sight of Peg; for we had 'igh words about the childern,—and she's a spiteful 'oman. But you can larn where

she be at Mr. Warney's—if so be he's still above-ground."

"And did this woman still go by the name of Joplin?"

Bill grinned: "She warn't such a spooney as that—that name was in your black books too much, Mr. R—— for a 'spectable nuss for sick bodies; no, she was then called Martha Skeggs, what was her own mother's name afore marridge. Anything more, gemmen?"

"I am satisfied," said the younger visitor, rising; "there is the purse, and Mr. R—— will bring you ten sovereigns in addition. Good-day to you."

Bill, with superabundant bows and flourishes, showed his visitors out, and then, in high glee, he began to romp with his children; and the whole family circle was in a state of uproarious enjoyment, when the door flew open, and in entered Grabman, his brief-bag in hand, dust-soiled, and unshaven.

"Aha, neighbour! your servant—your servant,—just come back!—always so merry—for the life of me, I couldn't help looking in! Dear me, Bill!

why, you're in luck !” and Mr. Grabman pointed to a pile of sovereigns which Bill had emptied from the purse to count over, and weigh on the tip of his forefinger.

“ Yes,” said Bill, sweeping the gold into his corderoy pocket ; “ and who do you think brought me these shiners ? Why, who but old Peggy, the 'oman wot you put out at Clap'am.”

“ Well, never mind Peggy, now, Bill ; I want to ask you what you have done with Margaret Joplin—whom, sly seducer that you are, you carried off from——”

“ Why, man, Peggy be Joplin, and Joplin be Peggy !—and it's for that piece of noos, that I got all them pretty new picters of his majesty, Bill—my namesake, God bliss 'im !”

“ D——n,” exclaimed Grabman, aghast—“ the young chap's spoiling my game again !” And seizing up his brief-bag, he darted out of the house, in the hope to arrive, at least, at Clapham before his competitors.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SHADES ON THE DIAL.

THE following morning was indeed eventful to the family at Laughton; and, as if conscious of what it brought forth, it rose dreary and sunless; one heavy mist covered all the landscape, and a raw drizzling rain fell pattering through the yellow leaves.

Madame Dalibard, pleading her infirmities, rarely left her room before noon, and Varney professed himself very irregular in his hours of rising; the breakfast, therefore, afforded no social assembly to the family, but each took that meal in the solitude of his or her own chamber. Percival, in whom all habits partook of the healthfulness and

simplicity of his character, rose habitually early ; and that day, in spite of the weather, walked forth betimes to meet the person charged with the letters from the post. He had done so for the last three or four days, impatient to hear from his mother, and calculating that it was full time to receive the expected answer to his confession and his prayer. He met the messenger at the bottom of the park, not far from Guy's Oak. This day he was not disappointed. The letter-bag contained three letters for himself, two with the foreign post-mark—the third in Ardworth's hand. It contained also a letter for Madame Dalibard, and two for Varney.

Leaving the messenger to take these last to the hall, Percival, with his own prizes, plunged into the hollow of the glen before him, and, seating himself at the foot of Guy's Oak, through the vast branches of which the rain scarcely came, and only in single, mournful drops, he opened first the letter in his mother's hand, and read as follows :—

“ My dear, dear Son,—How can I express to you the alarm your letter has given to me ! So these, then, are the new relations you have dis-

covered ! I fondly imagined that you were alluding to some of my own family, and conjecturing who amongst my many cousins could have so captivated your attention. These the new relations ! Lucretia Dalibard—Helen Mainwaring ! Percival, do you not know—— No, you cannot know—that Helen Mainwaring is the daughter of a disgraced man—of one who (more than suspected of fraud in the bank in which he was a partner) left his country, condemned even by his own father. If you doubt this, you have but to inquire at * * * *, not ten miles from Laughton, where the elder Mainwaring resided. Ask there, what became of William Mainwaring ! And Lucretia,—you do not know that the dying prayer of her uncle, Sir Miles St. John, was that she might never enter the house he bequeathed to your father. Not till after my poor Charles's death did I know the exact cause for Sir Miles's displeasure, though confident it was just ; but then amongst his papers I found the ungrateful letter which betrayed thoughts so dark, and passions so unwomanly, that I blushed for my sex to read it. Could it be possible that that poor

old man's prayers were unheeded—that that treacherous step could ever cross your threshold—that that cruel eye which read with such barbarous joy the ravages of death on a benefactor's face, could rest on the hearth, by which your frank truthful countenance has so often smiled away my tears, I should feel, indeed, as if a thunder-cloud hung over the roof.—No ! if you marry the niece, the aunt is banished from your house.—Good Heavens ! and it is the daughter of William Mainwaring, the niece and ward of Lucretia Dalibard, to whom you have given your faithful affection—whom you single from the world as your wife ! Oh ! my son—my beloved—my sole surviving child—do not think that I blame you, that my heart does not bleed while I write thus ; but I implore you on my knees to pause at least,—to suspend this intercourse, till I myself can reach England. And what then ? Why, then, Percival, I promise, on my part, that I will see your Helen with unprejudiced eyes—that I will put away from me, as far as possible, all visions of disappointed pride—the remembrance of faults not her own ; and if she be, as you say and think,

I will take her to my heart and call her 'Daughter.' Are you satisfied? If so, come to me—come at once, and take comfort from your mother's lips. How I long to be with you while you read this—how I tremble at the pain I so rudely give you! But my poor sister still chains me here, I dare not leave her, lest I should lose her last sigh. Come then, come, we will console each other.

"Your fond (how fond!) and sorrowing
mother,

MARY ST. JOHN.

"October 3rd, 1831.

"Sorrento.

"P.S. You see by this address that we have left Pisa for this place, recommended by our physician; hence an unhappy delay of some days in my reply. Ah, Percival, how sleepless will be my pillow till I hear from you!"

Long, very long, was it before St. John, mute and overwhelmed with the sudden shock of his anguish, opened his other letters—the first was from Captain Greville:

"What trap have you fallen into, foolish boy? That you would get into some silly scrape or

another was natural enough. But a scrape for life, Sir—that is serious! But, God bless you for your candour, my Percival—you have written to us in time—you are old fashioned enough to think that a mother's consent is necessary to a young man's union. And you have left it in our power to save you yet; it is not every boyish fancy that proves to be true love. But enough of this preaching; I shall do better than write scolding letters, I shall come and scold you in person. My servant is at this very moment packing my portmanteau, the *laquais-de-place* is gone to Naples for my passport. Almost as soon as you receive this, I shall be with you, and if I am a day or two later than the mail, be patient; do not commit yourself further. Break your heart if you please, but don't implicate your honour. I shall come at once to Curzon-street. Adieu!

“H. GREVILLE.”

Ardworth's letter was shorter than the others; fortunately so, for otherwise it had been unread:

“If I do not come to you myself the day after you receive this, dear Percival, which, indeed, is most

probable, I shall send you my proxy in one whom, for my sake, I know that you will kindly welcome. He will undertake my task, and clear up all the mysteries with which, I trust, my correspondence has thoroughly bewildered your lively imagination.

“ Yours, ever,

“ JOHN ARDWORTH.

“ Gray’s Inn.”

Little, indeed, did Percival’s imagination busy itself with the mysteries of Ardworth’s correspondence. His mind scarcely took in the sense of the words, over which his eye mechanically wandered.

And the letter which narrated the visit of Madame Dalibard to the house thus solemnly interdicted to her step, was on its way to his mother ; nay, by this time would almost have reached her. Greville was on the road ; nay, as his tutor’s letter had been forwarded from London—might, perhaps, be in Curzon-street that day. How desirable to see him before he could reach Laugh-ton, to prepare him for Madame Dalibard’s visit ; for Helen’s illness ; explain the position in which he was involved, and conciliate the old soldier’s

rough, kind heart to his love and his distress ! He did not dread the meeting with Greville ; he yearned for it. He needed an adviser, a confidant, a friend. To dismiss abruptly his guests from his house—impossible ! to abandon Helen because of her father's crime, or her aunt's fault, (whatever that last might be—and no clear detail of it was given) *that* never entered his thoughts ! And yet, before he had seen Helen, or even after he had but seen her once, if he had learned that her name had been sullied by disgrace,—that peculiar kind of pride which he had been taught as a part of honour itself, and which consisted in reverence for integrity, and a scrupulous horror of every blot on his scutcheon,—would doubtless have told him that he might, without blemish to his name, wed with the low-born and penniless, but never with the child of disgrace. But now, all the considerations which are strong only to reason not enamoured, were swept away by the young force of a love which made even disgrace itself an argument in its favour. Pure and unsullied, the starry face of Helen shone the holier for the cloud around it. An inexpressible and

chivalrous compassion mingled with his love and confirmed his faith. She, poor child, to suffer for the deeds of others! No. What availed his own power as man, and dignity as gentleman, if they could not wrap in their own shelter the one by whom such shelter was now doubly needed. Thus, amidst all his emotions—firm and resolved, at least on one point—and beginning already to recover the hope of his sanguine nature, from his reliance on his mother's love, on the promises that softened her disclosures and warnings, and on his conviction that Helen had only to be seen for every scruple to give way, Percival wandered back towards the house, and, coming abruptly on the terrace, he encountered Varney, who was leaning motionless against the balustrade, with an open letter in his hand. Varney was deadly pale, and there was the trace of some recent and gloomy agitation in the relaxed muscles of his cheeks, usually so firmly rounded. But Percival did not heed his appearance as he took him gravely by the arm, and leading him into the garden, said, after a painful pause---

“Varney, I am about to ask you two questions, which your close connexion with Madame Dalibard may enable you to answer; but in which, from obvious motives, I must demand the strictest confidence. You will not hint to her or to Helen what I am about to say?”

Varney stared uneasily on Percival's serious countenance, and gave the promise required.

“First, then, for what offence was Madame Dalibard expelled her uncle's house—this house of Laughton?”

“Secondly, What is the crime with which Mr. Mainwaring, Helen's father, is charged?”

“With regard to the first,” said Varney, recovering his composure, “I thought I had already told you that Sir Miles was a proud man, and that, in consequence of discovering a girlish flirtation between his niece Lucretia (now Madame Dalibard) and Mainwaring, who afterwards jilted her for Helen's mother, he altered his will—‘expelled her his house,’ is too harsh a phrase. This is all I know. With regard to the second question, no crime was ever brought home to William Mainwaring. He was suspected of dealing

improperly with the funds of the bank, and he repaid the alleged deficit by the sacrifice of all he possessed."

"This is the truth!" exclaimed Percival, joyfully.

"The plain truth, I believe; but why these questions at this moment. Ah, you too, I see, have had letters—I understand! Lady Mary gives these reasons for withholding her consent."

"Her consent is not withheld," answered Percival; "but, shall I own it?—remember, I have your promise not to wound and offend Madame Dalibard by the disclosure: my mother does refer to the subjects above alluded to, and Captain Greville, my old friend and tutor, is on his way to England—perhaps, to-morrow; he may arrive at Laughton."

"Ha!" said Varney, startled—"to-morrow!—and what sort of man is this Captain Greville?"

"The best man possible for such a case as mine—kind-hearted, yet cool, sagacious, the finest observer, the quickest judge of character—nothing escapes him. Oh, one interview will suffice to show him all Helen's innocent and matchless excellence!"

“To-morrow ! this man comes to-morrow !”

“All that I fear is—for he is rather rough and blunt in his manner,—all that I fear is, his first surprise—and, dare I say, displeasure, at seeing this poor Madame Dalibard, whose faults, I fear, were graver than you suppose, at the house from which her uncle—to whom, indeed, I owe this inheritance——”

“I see—I see !” interrupted Varney, quickly. “And Madame Dalibard is the most susceptible of women—so well-born, and so poor, so gifted and so helpless—it is natural. Can you not write, and put off this Captain Greville for a few days?—until, indeed, I can find some excuse for terminating our visit.”

“But my letter may be hardly in time to reach him ; he may be in town to-day.”

“Go then to town at once ; you can be back late at night, or at least to-morrow. Anything better than wounding the pride of a woman, on whom, after all, you must depend for free and open intercourse with Helen.”

“That is exactly what I thought of ; but what excuse ?——”

“Excuse!—a thousand! Every man coming of age into such a property, has business with his lawyers; or why not say simply that you want to meet a friend of yours, who has just left your mother in Italy?—in short, any excuse suffices, and none can be offensive.”

“I will order my carriage instantly.”

“Right!” exclaimed Varney; and his eye followed the receding form of Percival with a mixture of fierce exultation and anxious fear. Then turning towards the window of the turret-chamber, in which Madame Dalibard reposed, and seeing it still closed, he muttered an impatient oath; but even while he did so, the shutters were slowly opened, and a footman, stepping from the porch, approached Varney with a message, that Madame Dalibard would see him in five minutes, if he would then have the goodness to ascend to her room.

Before that time was well expired, Varney was in the chamber. Madame Dalibard was up, and in her chair; and the unwonted joy which her countenance evinced, was in strong contrast with

the sombre shade upon her son-in-law's brow, and the nervous quiver of his lip."

"Gabriel," she said, as he drew near to her, "my son is found!"

"I know it," he answered, petulantly.

"You!—from whom?"

"From Grabman."

"And I from a still better authority—from Walter Ardworth himself! He lives; he will restore my child!" She extended a letter while she spoke. He, in return, gave her, not that still crumpled in his hand, but one which he drew from his breast. These letters severally occupied both, begun and finished almost in the same moment.

That from Grabman ran thus:—

"Dear Jason,—Toss up your hat, and cry hip-hip! At last, from person to person, I have tracked the lost Vincent Braddell. He lives still! We can maintain his identity in any court of law. Scarce in time for the post, I have not a moment for further particulars. I shall employ the next two days in reducing all the evidence to a regular

digest, which I will despatch to you. Meanwhile, prepare, as soon as may be, to put me in possession of my fee,—5000*l.*, and my expedition merits something more. Yours,

“NICHOLAS GRABMAN.”

The letter from Ardworth was no less positive :

“Madam,—In obedience to the commands of a dying friend, I took charge of his infant, and concealed its existence from his mother—yourself. On returning to England, I need not say that I was not unmindful of my trust. Your son lives ; and, after mature reflection, I have resolved to restore him to your arms. In this I have been decided by what I have heard from one whom I can trust, of your altered habits, your decorous life, your melancholy infirmities, and the generous protection you have given to the orphan of my poor cousin Susan, my old friend Mainwaring. Alfred Braddell himself, if it be permitted to him to look down and read my motives, will pardon me, I venture to feel assured, this departure from his injunctions. Whatever the faults which displeased him, they have been amply chastised.

And your son, grown to man, can no longer be endangered by example, in tending the couch, or soothing the repentance, of his mother.

“These words are severe ; but you will pardon them in him who gives you back your child. I shall venture to wait on you in person, with such proofs as may satisfy you as to the identity of your son. I count on arriving at Laughton to-morrow. Meanwhile, I simply sign myself by a name, in which you will recognise the kinsman to one branch of your family, and the friend of your dead husband,

J. WALTER ARDWORTH.”

“Craven Hotel, October, 1831.”

“Well! and you are not rejoiced!” said Lucretia, gazing surprised on Varney’s sullen and unsympathizing face.

“No! because time presses; because, even while discovering your son, you may fail in securing his heritage; because, in the midst of your triumph, I see Newgate opening to myself! Look you, I, too, have had my news—less pleasing than yours. This Stubmore (curse him!)

writes me word, that he shall certainly be in town next month at farthest, and that he meditates, immediately on his arrival, transferring the legacy from the Bank of England to an excellent mortgage of which he has heard. Were it not for this scheme of ours, nothing would be left for me but flight and exile."

"A month!—that is a long time. Do you think, now that my son is found, and that son one like John Ardworth, (for there can be no doubt that my surmise was right,) with genius to make station the pedestal to the power I dreamed of in my youth, but which my sex forbade me to attain—do you think I will keep him a month from his inheritance? Before the month is out, you shall replace what you have taken, and buy your trustee's silence, if need be—either from the sums you have insured, or from the rents of Laughton."

"Lucretia!" said Varney, whose fresh colours had grown livid—"what is to be done must be done at once! Percival St. John has heard from his mother. Attend!" And Varney rapidly related the questions St. John had put to him, the dreaded arrival of Captain Greville, the danger

of so keen an observer—the necessity, at all events, of abridging their visit—the urgency of hastening the catastrophe to its close.

Lucretia listened in ominous and steadfast silence.

“ But,” she said, at last, “ you have persuaded St. John to give this man the meeting in London,—to put off his visit for the time ! St. John will return to us to-morrow. Well ; and if he finds his Helen is no more—grief sometimes kills the mourner suddenly !”

“ Yet, yet, this rapidity, if necessary, is perilous. Nothing in Helen’s state forbodes *sudden* death by natural means. The strangeness of two deaths—both so young—Greville in England, if not here—hastening down to examine, to inquire, with such prepossessions against you :—there must be an inquest !”

“ Well, and what can be discovered ? It was I who shrunk before—it is I who urge now dispatch. I feel as in my proper home in these halls. I would not leave them again but to my grave ! I stand on the hearth of my youth. I fight for my rights, and my son’s. Perish those who oppose me !”

A fell energy and power were in the aspect of the murderess as she thus spoke ; and while her determination awed the inferior villany of Varney, it served somewhat to mitigate his fears.

As in more detail they began to arrange their execrable plans, Percival, while the horses were being harnessed to take him to the nearest post town, sought Helen, and found her in the little chamber which he had described and appropriated as her own, when his fond fancy had sketched the fair outline of the future.

This room had been originally fitted up for the private devotions of the Roman-catholic wife of an ancestor, in the reign of Charles II. ; and in a recess, half veiled by a curtain, there still stood that holy symbol, which, whether protestant or Roman catholic, no one sincerely penetrated with the solemn pathos of sacred history can behold unmoved—the Cross of the Divine agony. Before this holy symbol, Helen stood in earnest reverence. She did not kneel (for the forms of the religion in which she had been reared were opposed to that posture of worship before the graven image), but you could see in that coun-

tenance, eloquent at once with the enthusiasm and the meekness of piety, that the soul was filled with the memories and the hopes, which, age after age, have consoled the sufferer, and inspired the martyr. The soul knelt to the idea, if the knee bowed not to the image, embracing the tender grandeur of the sacrifice, and the vast inheritance opened to faith in the redemption.

The young man held his breath while he gazed. He was moved, and he was awed. Slowly Helen turned towards him, and, smiling sweetly, held out to him her hand. They seated themselves in silence in the depth of the overhanging casement; and the mournful character of the scene without, where, dimly through the misty rains, gloomed the dark foliage of the cedars, made them insensibly draw closer to each other, in the instinct of love when the world frowns around it. Percival wanted the courage to say that he had come to take farewell, though but for a day, and Helen spoke first.

“I cannot guess why it is, Percival, but I am startled at the change I feel in myself—no, not in health, dear Percival, I mean in mind,—during the

last few months ;—since, indeed, we have known each other. I remember so well the morning in which my aunt's letter arrived at the dear vicarage. We were returning from the village fair, and my good guardian was smiling at my notions of the world. I was then so giddy, and light, and thoughtless—everything presented itself to me in such gay colours,—I scarcely believed in sorrow—I forgot that to all life there is a grave. And now I feel as if I were awakened to a truer sense of nature—of the ends of our being here ; I seem to know that life is a grave and solemn thing. Yet I am not less happy, Percival. No, I think, rather, that I knew not true happiness till I knew you. I have read somewhere that the slave is gay in his holiday from toil ; if you free him, if you educate him, the gaiety vanishes, and he cares no more for the dance under the palm-tree. But is he less happy ? So it is with me !”

“ My sweet Helen, I would rather have one gay smile of old—the arch, careless laugh which came so naturally from those rosy lips, than hear you talk of happiness with that quiver in your voice—those tears in your eyes.”

"Yet gaiety," said Helen, thoughtfully, and in the strain of her pure, truthful poetry of soul, "is only the light impression of the present moment—the play of the mere spirits; and happiness seems a forethought of the future, spreading on, far and broad, over all time and space."

"And you live, then, in the future, at last—you have no misgivings now, my Helen. Well, that comforts me! Say it, Helen,—say the future will be ours!"

"It will—it will—for ever and for ever," said Helen, earnestly, and her eyes involuntarily rested on the Cross.

In his younger spirit and less imaginative nature, Percival did not comprehend the depth of sadness implied in Helen's answer; taking it literally, he felt as if a load were lifted from his heart, and kissing with rapture the hand he held, he exclaimed—"Yes, this shall soon—oh, soon be mine! I fear nothing while you hope. You cannot guess how those words have cheered me, for I am leaving you, though but for a few hours, and I shall repeat those words—they will ring in my ear, in my heart, till we meet again."

“Leaving me!” said Helen, turning pale, and her clasp on his hand tightened. Poor child, she felt, mysteriously, a sentiment of protection in his presence.

“But at most for a day. My old tutor, of whom we have so often conversed, is on his way to England—perhaps, even now in London. He has some wrong impressions against your aunt—his manner is blunt and rough. It is necessary that I should see him before he comes hither—you know how susceptible is your aunt’s pride—just to prepare him for meeting her,—you understand?”

“What impressions against my aunt? Does he even know her?” asked Helen; and if such a sentiment as suspicion could cross that candid innocence of mind—that sentiment towards this stern relation whose arms had never embraced her—whose lips had never spoken of the past—whose history was as a sealed volume, disturbed and disquieted her.

“It is because he has never known her that he does her wrong. Some old story of her indiscretion as a girl—of her uncle’s displeasure—what

matters now?" said Percival, shrinking sensitively from one disclosure that might wound Helen in her kinswoman. "Meanwhile, dearest, you will be prudent—you will avoid this damp air, and keep quietly at home, and amuse yourself, sweet fancier of the future, in planning how to improve these old halls, when they and their unworthy master are your own. God bless you!—God guard you, Helen!"

He rose, and with that loyal chivalry of love which felt respect the more for the careless guardianship to which his Helen was entrusted, he refrained from that parting kiss which their pure courtship warranted,—for which his lip yearned. But as he lingered, an irresistible impulse moved Helen's heart. Mechanically she opened her arms, and her head sunk upon his shoulder. In that embrace, they remained some moments silent, and an angel might unrepvingly have heard their hearts beat through the stillness.

At length, Percival tore himself from those arms which relaxed their imploring hold reluctantly—as the drowning wretch from the one plank on

the merciless sea:—she heard his hurried step descend the stairs, and, in a moment more, the roll of the wheels in the court without:—a dreary sense as of some utter desertion, some everlasting bereavement, chilled and appalled her. She stood motionless, as if turned to stone, on the floor; suddenly the touch of something warm on her hand—a plaining whine, awoke her attention;—Percival's favourite dog missed his master, and had slunk for refuge to her. The dread sentiment of loneliness vanished in that humble companionship; and, seating herself on the ground, she took the dog in her arms, and bending over it, wept in silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

MURDER, TOWARDS HIS DESIGN, MOVES LIKE
A GHOST.

THE reader will, doubtless, have observed the consummate art with which the poisoner had hitherto advanced upon her prey. The design conceived from afar, and executed with elaborate stealth, defied every chance of detection, against which the ingenuity of practised villany could guard. Grant even that the deadly drugs should betray the nature of the death they inflicted, that by some un conjectured secret in the science of chemistry, the presence of those vegetable compounds, which had hitherto baffled every known and positive test, in the posthumous examination of the most experienced surgeons, should be clearly ascertained, not one suspicion seemed

likely to fall upon the ministrant of death. The medicines were never brought to Madame Dalibard, were never given by her hand; nothing ever tasted by the victim could be tracked to her aunt. The helpless condition of the cripple, which Lucretia had assumed, forbade all notion even of her power of movement. Only in the dead of night, when, as she believed, every human eye that could watch her was sealed in sleep, and then in those dark habiliments, which seemed but a part of darkness, which (even, as might sometimes happen, if the victim herself were awake) a chance ray of light struggling through chink or shutter could scarcely distinguish from the general gloom, did she steal to the chamber, and infuse the colourless and tasteless liquid* in the morning draught, meant to bring strength and healing. Grant that the draught was untouched—that it was examined by the surgeon—that the fell admixture could be detected—suspicion would wander anywhere rather than to that crippled and helpless kinswoman, who could not rise from her bed without aid.

* The celebrated *aqua di Tufania* (Tufania water) wholly without taste or colour.

And, hitherto, so gradually had the poison been administered—so well had it feigned the fluctuating progress of some natural malady—that suspicion could scarcely enter into the mind of the most suspicious professional attendant; all moral evidence would have repelled it. She, Helen Mainwaring, surrounded only by kindred and love—*she* marked out for revenge, seemingly without cause, the victim of schemes traceable to no object—who could harbour so monstrous an idea?

But now this patience was to be abandoned, the folds of the serpent were to coil in one fell clasp upon its prey. It became difficult, as Varney had observed, to give to a sudden death, for which no previous symptoms had prepared the way, the likeness of natural disease. Yet that difficulty had been foreseen;—in the chances of this desperate game the probable expediency of some stroke more prompt and abrupt than at first contemplated, had not been overlooked by calculators so cold-blooded and resolved. Of our mortal diseases, that which assails us, young and old, with the least forewarning, is the terrible *angina pectoris*. Its causes are often unseen—its approach undivined by the leach who attends us

daily. The simulation, or artificial production, of this disease, was amongst those we have cited as the masterpieces of Dalibard's devilish art. And the ingredients from which to obtain it were now prepared. Even in case of surgical examination, the fatal seizure would seem accounted for, by the appearance of the heart's muscular substance, which the previous poisons had affected, paling its hues and softening its fibres. And though that mortal malady is more common in middle age than youth—more common still in men than in females—still, instances enow of its occurrence in persons of nervous temperament, and affected easily by mental emotions, (no matter what the age or sex,) could be found in medical experience, to authorize the verdict of 'Natural Death.'

Fiend as Lucretia had become, and hardened as were all her resolves by the discovery of her son, and her impatience to endow him with her forfeited inheritance, she yet shrank from the face of Helen that day; on the excuse of illness, she kept her room, and admitted only Varney, who stole in from time to time, with creeping step and haggard countenance, to sustain her courage or

his own. And every time he entered, he found Lucretia sitting with Walter Ardworth's open letter in her hand, and turning with a preternatural excitement, that seemed almost like aberration of mind, from the grim and horrid topic which he invited, to thoughts of wealth, and power, and triumph, and exulting prophecies of the fame her son should achieve: He looked but on the blackness of the gulf, and shuddered; her vision overleapt it, and smiled on the misty palaces her fancy built beyond.

Not displeased to be so left alone, that day, to her own thoughts, Helen passed the hours till night. And what were those thoughts? Perhaps, as in some natural diseases, the imagination takes higher flights, or the very reason acquires a more lucid clearness, so the operation of the deadly drugs might have had an effect upon the loftier organs of the brain; but, in the complete solitude in which the greater part of that day was passed, Helen's reveries took a sublimer character than had ever been imparted to them before. Even her tenderness for Percival arose far and far above the sentiment, pure and noble as it ever had been,

with which his image had heretofore been cherished ; it became unspeakably solemn ; it ceased, wholly and abruptly, to mingle with the prospects of earth. In a kind of ecstasy, or vision, she seemed to see his Future spread before her, in its various revolutions of thought and action ; saw him in his useful manhood—in his declining age ; stooped over his bed of death, and heard the knell tolling for his grave. Yet even in these darker visions, there seemed no sorrow. She saw herself, as it were, living with him, yet detached from life ; not as one dead, but one whom no death could reach ;—hovering over him, whispering, soothing, ennobling, elevating, as waiting for indissoluble union. Then, at moments, that genius within her, which had never found audible voice or fitting sphere, seemed to commune with her as a separate being from herself. It became a distinct and living thing ; it penetrated her soul with a language, not of words, but of wordless melodies. And on that music, as on what the Germans so beautifully call the ‘ tone-ladder,’ or scale of sound, she seemed borne aloft, step after step, till, like some mighty landscape from a hill-

top, Creation lay stretched below, and she recognised the sphere which that genius had not found before. It was, indeed, as if some sort of spiritual magnetism was in the atmosphere, calling up that hidden life within life, animating that world of coherent sleep, which the disciples of Mesmer bid us mark in some gifted somnambule. A wondrous poetry floated over the universe, round, below, and aloft; and of this poetry she felt as if she were not a voice, but a part. It was, that day, as if those singular powers, that, in her immaturity of youth and experience, had but fluttered vaguely, were suddenly released; as if, for one day, she might know and feel, upon earth, what those powers, the inheritors of Heaven, symbolize and foretel;—their combination of intelligence and affection, tender with the love of the cherub, mighty with the knowledge of the seraph—so serene, yet so exquisite in their ineffable enjoyment—so full of hope, that all sorrow is defied—so strong in the sense of vitality, that the falsehood of that non-existent thing, called *death*, became clear, as by a revelation!

Gradually, as Night settled over the world, this

trance, if so it may be called, ceased—and was succeeded first by a sense of exhaustion—next by an indescribable melancholy. As she turned from the chamber in which Percival had left her, (and in which she had passed the chief part of the day,) to retire to rest, she stopped involuntarily; scarcely knowing what she did, she drew aside the curtain from the casement, and looked long and fondly on the scene below. The rain had ceased—the clouds vanished from the sky. The garden, the groves beyond, were seen pale and dimly distinct in the tranquil starlight. Her eye rested sadly on the terrace, where she had so often sat with her young lover—sadly, but she knew not why. Then, turning within, her gaze dwelt lingeringly on the little room, noting, as if to remember it for ever, each familiar household thing. Slowly, at length, she moved away, and lingering still as she went, seemed to treasure in her memory every spot which her foot-step passed. So, along the corridor she glided—and, pausing at her aunt's door, knocked gently, —a voice quick and startled, bade her enter; she came in, with her sweet caressing look, and took

Lucretia's hand, which struggled from the clasp. Bending over that haggard brow, she said, simply, yet to Lucretia's ear the voice seemed that of command: "Let me kiss you, this night!" and her lips pressed that brow. The murderess shuddered, and closed her eyes; when she opened them, the angel visitor was gone.

Night deepened and deepened into those hours from the first of which we number the morn, though night still is at her full. Moon-beam and star-beam came through the casements, shyly and fairy-like, as on that night, when the murderess was young and crimeless—in deed, if not in thought—that night, when in the book of Leechcraft, she meted out the hours, in which a human life might still interpose between her passion and its end. Along the stairs, through the hall, marched the armies of light—noiseless, and still and clear, as the judgments of God, amidst the darkness and shadow of mortal destinies. In one chamber alone, the folds, curtained close, forebade all but a single ray—that ray came direct, as the stream from a lantern, as the beam reflected back from an eye:—as an eye it seemed watchful, and stead-

fast, through the dark : it shot along the floor—it fell at the foot of the bed.

Suddenly, in the exceeding hush, there was a strange and ghastly sound—it was the howl of a dog ! Helen started from her sleep. Percival's dog had followed her, into her room, it had coiled itself, grateful for the kindness, at the foot of the bed. Now, it was on the pillow, she felt its heart beat against her hand ; it was trembling ; its hairs bristled up, and the howl changed into a shrill bark of terror and wrath. Alarmed, she looked round : quickly between her and that ray from the crevice, a shapeless Darkness passed, and was gone ! So undistinguishable, so without outline, that it had no likeness of any living form :—like a cloud, like a thought, like an omen, it gloomed and it vanished. The girl murmured a prayer ; and the ray, no longer obscured, seemed to rest upon her with a melancholy smile. The dog licked her face, and heaving a deep sigh as of relief, nestled itself again to sleep. She listened, but all was still—she gazed, but nothing save the ray, narrow and aslant, and steadfast, was visible ; her fears ceased — she thought what

she had seen was but the delusion of the sense between sleep and waking ; and, in the courage and trust of innocence, her eyes closed in dreams, —perhaps of happiness and love.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MESSENGER SPEEDS—THE SPY FLIES.

TOWARDS the afternoon of the following day, an elderly gentleman was seated in the coffee-room of an hotel at Southampton, engaged in writing a letter, while the waiter in attendance was employed on the wires that fettered the petulant spirit contained in a bottle of Schweppe's soda water. There was something in the aspect of the old gentleman, and in the very tone of his voice, that inspired respect, and the waiter had cleared the other tables of their latest newspapers to place before him. He had only just arrived by the packet from Havre, and even the newspapers had not been to him that primary attraction which they

generally constitute to the Englishman returning to his bustling native land, which, somewhat to his surprise, has contrived to go on tolerably well during his absence.

We use our privilege of looking over his shoulder while he writes :—

“ Here I am, then, dear Lady Mary, at Southampton, and within an easy drive of the old Hall! A file of Galignani’s Journals, which I found on the road between Marseilles and Paris, informed me, under the head of “fashionable movements,” that “Percival St. John, Esq., was gone to his seat at Laughton.” According to my customary tactics of marching at once to the seat of action, I therefore made direct for Havre, instead of crossing from Calais, and I suppose I shall find our young gentleman engaged in the slaughter of hares and partridges. You see, it is a good sign that he can leave London. Keep up your spirits, my dear friend. If Perce has been really duped and taken in,—as all you mothers are so apt to fancy,—rely upon an old soldier to defeat the enemy, and expose the *ruse*. But if, after all, the girl is such as he

describes and believes—innocent, artless, and worthy his affection—oh, then I range myself, with your own good heart, upon his side. Never will I run the risk of unsettling a man's whole character for life by wantonly interfering with his affections. But there we are agreed.

“In a few hours I shall be with our dear boy, and his whole heart will come out clear and candid as when it beat under his midshipman's true blue. In a day or two, I shall make him take me to town, to introduce me to the whole nest of them. Then I shall report progress. Adieu, till then! Kind regards to your poor sister. I think we shall have a mild winter. Not one warning twinge, as yet, of the old rheumatism.

“Ever your devoted old friend

“and *preux chevalier*,

“H. GREVILLE.”

The captain had completed his letter, sipped his soda water, and was affixing to his communication his seal, when he heard the rattle of a post-chaise without. Fancying it was the one he had ordered, he went to the open window which

looked on the street; but the chaise contained travellers, only halting to change horses. Somewhat to his surprise, and a little to his chagrin,—for the captain did not count on finding company at the Hall,—he heard one of the travellers in the chaise ask the distance to Laughton. The countenance of the questioner was not familiar to him. But, leaving the worthy captain to question the landlord, without any satisfactory information, and to hasten the chaise for himself, we accompany the travellers on their way to Laughton. They were but two—the proper complement of a post-chaise—and they were both of the ruder sex. The elder of the two was a man of middle age, but whom the wear and tear of active life had evidently advanced towards the state called *elderly*. But there was still abundant life in his quick, dark eye; and that mercurial youthfulness of character, which, in some happy constitutions, seems to defy years and sorrows, evinced itself in a rapid play of countenance, and as much gesticulation as the narrow confines of the vehicle, and the position of a traveller, will permit. The younger man, far more grave in

aspect and quiet in manner, leaned back in the corner with folded arms, and listened with respectful attention to his companion.

“Certainly, Dr. Johnson is right—great happiness in an English post-chaise properly driven!—more exhilarating than a palanquin: “*Post equitem sedet atra cura*”—true only of such scrubby hacks as old Horace could have known. Black Care does not sit behind English posters—eh, my boy?” As he spoke this, the gentleman had twice let down the glass of the vehicle, and twice put it up again.

“Yet,” he resumed, without noticing the brief, good-humoured reply of his companion—“yet this is an anxious business enough that we are about. I don’t feel quite easy in my conscience. Poor Braddell’s injunctions were very strict, and I disobey them. It is on your responsibility, John!”

“I take it, without hesitation. All the motives for so stern a severance must have ceased, and is it not a sufficient punishment to find in that hoped-for son, a ——”

“Poor woman!” interrupted the elder gentleman, in whom we begin to recognise the

soi-disant Mr. Tomkins—"true, indeed—too true. How well I remember the impression Lucretia Clavering first produced on me;—and to think of her now as a miserable cripple! By Jove, you are right, sir! Drive on, postboy—quick, quick!"

There was a short silence.

The elder gentleman, abruptly, put his hand upon his companion's arm.

"What consummate acuteness—what patient research you have shown! What could I have done in this business without you? How often had that garrulous Mrs. Mivers bored me with Becky Carruthers, and the coral, and St. Paul's, and not a suspicion came across me;—a word was sufficient for you;—and then to track this unfeeling old Joplin, from place to place, till you find her absolutely a servant under the very roof of Mrs. Braddell herself! Wonderful! Ah, boy, you will be an honour to the law, and to your country. And, what a hard-hearted rascal you must think me, to have deserted you so long!"

"My dear father," said John Ardworth, tenderly—"your love now recompenses me for all.

And ought I not rather to rejoice not to have known the tale of a mother's shame, until I could half forget it on a father's heart?"

"John," said the elder Ardworth, with a choking voice—"I ought to wear sackcloth all my life, for having given you such a mother. When I think what I have suffered from the habit of carelessness in those confounded money matters (—" *irritamenta malorum*," indeed!) I have only one consolation, that my patient, noble son, is free from my vice. You would not believe what a well-principled, honourable fellow I was at your age, and yet, how truly I said to my poor friend, William Mainwaring, one day at Laughton (I remember it now)—'Trust me with anything else but half-a-guinea!' Why, sir, it was that fault that threw me into low company—that brought me in contact with my innkeeper's daughter at Limerick. I fell in love, and I married, (for, with all my faults, I was never a seducer, John.) I did not own my marriage; why should I? my relatives had cut me already. You were born, and hunted poor devil as I was, I forgot all by your cradle. Then, in the midst of my

troubles, that ungrateful woman deserted me—then, I was led to believe that it was not my own son whom I had kissed and blessed. Ah, but for that thought should I have left you as I did ! And even in infancy, you had the features only of your mother. Then, when the death of the adulteress set me free, and years afterwards, in India, I married again, and had new ties—my heart grew still harder to you. I excused myself by knowing that at least you were cared for, and trained to good by a better guide than I. But when, by so strange a hazard, the very priest who had confessed your mother on her death-bed, (she was a Catholic,) came to India, and (for he had known me at Limerick) recognised my altered person, and obeying his penitent's last injunctions, assured me that you were my son,—oh, John, then, believe me, I hastened back to England, on the wings of remorse ! Love you, boy ! I have left at Madras, three children, young and fair, by a woman, now in heaven, who never wronged me, and, by my soul, John Ardworth, you are dearer to me than all !”

The father's head drooped on his son's breast as he spoke ; then, dashing away his tears, he resumed :

“Ah, why would not Braddell permit me, as I proposed, to find for his son the same guardianship as that to which I entrusted my own ; but his bigotry besotted him ;—a clergyman of the high church,—that was worse than an atheist ! I had no choice left to me but the roof of that she-hypocrite. Yet I ought to have come to England when I heard of the child's loss, braved duns and all ; but I was money-making, money-making—retribution for money-wasting ;—and—well, it's no use repenting !—and—and—there is the lodge, the park, the old trees ! Poor Sir Miles !”

Meanwhile, at Laughton, all was in the greatest confusion and alarm. At the early morning, Helen was found by the maid in a state of insensibility. From this, she was awakened by sharp spasms in the region of the heart. Madame Dalibard, on being apprised of her niece's seizure, evinced great anxiety and apprehension. Varney, himself, rode in search of Dr. Simmons, the usual medical attendant. When the doctor arrived, he

made no secret of his serious alarm—the symptoms were unquestionably those of *angina pectoris*. The accustomed remedies were promptly applied, and procured a respite from pain, which afforded brief hopes; but before noon, the spasms came on with renewed violence. Madame Dalibard at first abstained from entering the sick room; but after a short, private interview with Varney, who was supposed to report the increasing gravity of the case, she was wheeled in her chair to her niece's bedside; and her colourless countenance, more like that of one dead than alive, with her intense silence, broken only by hurried questions, gasped forth as her anxious eye followed the physician, at times almost shared the sympathy of the spectators with the fast-sinking niece.

Varney waited without, pacing to and fro the corridor, sometimes entering the sick chamber for a moment, then returning to his sentry-like pace and post. The servants passed through gallery, hall, and chamber, lingering and whispering in groupes—the whole stately economy of the household was disorganized. The pity for Helen—the terrible sympathy felt for Percival, reached even the

lowest menials. The very scullions gathered at the head of the stairs, or crept to the entrance of the corridor. Horses were saddled, grooms in waiting, lest fresh advice should be needed, or fresh medicines sent for. In the midst of this confusion, Beck, who had been dispatched in the earlier part of the day, in search of another physician, (unluckily from home,) wandered through the corridor, or stood near the bedchamber door, unnoticed even by Varney. At length, a little after noon, Varney stopped one of the women hurrying into the chamber, and said—"Tell poor Madame Dalibard to come out for a minute. The scene will be too much for her. I have just thought of a new remedy; pray have her wheeled back into her own room; I will speak to her there." The woman nodded, and entered. Varney turning round then, for the first time, noticed Beck, and said, roughly—

"What do you do here? Wait below till you are sent for."

Beck pulled his forelock, and retreated back, not in the direction of the principal staircase, but towards that used by the servants, and

which his researches into the topography of the mansion had now made known to him. To gain these back stairs he had to pass Lucretia's room; the door stood ajar; Varney's face was turned from him. Beck breathed hard, looked round, then crept within, and, in a moment, was behind the folds of the tapestry.

Soon the chair in which sate Madame Dalibard—(her posture unusually erect—the expression of her countenance preternaturally locked and rigid)—was drawn by Varney himself into the room.

Shutting the door with care, and turning the key, Gabriel said, with low, suppressed passion—

“Is your courage gone? Does your mind wander? I have seen you in trials as dread as this, and where less was to be gained; and never before have I seen you thus!”

Lucretia's lips moved, and she raised her hand to her brow, with wandering fingers, as if to wipe from it a stain. “It is the kiss here!” she muttered—“the kiss burns!” then, with an effort, recovering some of her wonted self-possession, she said—“What do you complain of?—the

work is done ! She kissed me last night ; but I read again her father's protestations of faith and love—I read again the letter announcing the discovery of my son ; and I mixed the poison with an untrembling hand ! I stole in ! The light came from God's heaven—it was God's eye ! And the dog howled as at a visitor from the grave—a fiend from another world ! And she started from sleep—for the first time she started from her sleep—and—what matter !—to-night the slumber will be more sound !”

“ Rouse yourself—rouse !” exclaimed Varney, almost rudely grasping her arm. “ Remember how much we have yet to prepare for—how much to do ! Percival's return—perhaps, this Greville's ? *Percival* ! Give me the drug for *him* ! The key !—the key !”

“ Enough of murder for one day——”

“ And that murder, then, has been committed in vain for you, if not for myself. If we lose the first occasion of the boy's shock and grief, what other, to make sudden death probable, will occur ? Your son—soon you will clasp him in your arms—as a beggar, or as the Lord of Laughton !”

Lucretia rose abruptly from her seat at those words ; she went at once to her secretary—unlocked it—drew forth the fatal casket—opened it—returned to the table—and sate down quietly before it, motioning to Varney to seat himself also. This done, for a few moments they bent in silence over the contents.

When the selection was made, and Varney had secreted it on his person, he approached the fire in the grate, and blew the wood embers to a blaze.

“And now,” he said, with his icy irony of smile, “we may dismiss these useful instruments, perhaps for ever. Though Walter Ardworth, in restoring, himself, your son, leaves us dependent on that son’s filial affection, and I may have, therefore, little to hope for from the succession, to secure which I have risked, and am again to risk my life, I yet trust to that influence which you never fail to obtain over others. I take it for granted, that, when these halls are Vincent Braddell’s, we shall have no need of gold, nor of these pale alchemies. Perish, then, the mute witnesses of our acts!—the elements we have bowed to our will ! No poisons shall be found

in our hoards ! Fire, consume your consuming children !”

As he spoke, he threw upon the hearth the contents of the casket, and set his heel upon the logs. A bluish flame shot up, breaking into countless sparks, and then died.

Lucretia watched him, without speaking.

In coming back towards the table, Varney felt something hard beneath his tread ; he stooped, and picked up the ring which has before been described as amongst the ghastly treasures of the casket, and which had rolled on the floor, almost to Lucretia’s feet, as he had emptied the contents on the hearth.

“ This, at least, need tell no tales,” said he—“ a pity to destroy so rare a piece of workmanship—one, too, which we never can replace !”

“ Ay,” said Lucretia, abstractedly,—“ and, if detection comes, it may be a refuge from the gibbet—give me the ring !”

“ A refuge more terrible than the detection,” said Varney—“ beware of such a thought !” as Lucretia, taking it from his hand, placed the ring on her finger.

“And now, I leave you for awhile to re-collect yourself—to compose your countenance, and your thoughts. I will go back into Helen’s room, and urge fresh advice from Southampton.”

Lucretia, with her eyes fixed on the floor, did not heed him, and he withdrew.

So motionless was her attitude—so still her very breathing—that the unseen witness behind the tapestry—who, while struck with horror at what he had overheard (the general purport of which it was impossible that he could misunderstand), was parched with impatience to escape—to rescue his beloved master from his impending fate,—ventured to creep along the wall to the threshold—to peer forth from the arras, and seeing her eyes still down-cast, to emerge, and place his hand on the door.

At that very moment Lucretia looked up, and saw him gliding from the tapestry—their eyes met—his were fascinated as the bird’s by the snake’s. At the sight, all her craft—her intellect returned. With a glance, she comprehended the terrible danger that awaited her. Before he was aware of her movement, she was at his side—her hand on his own—her voice in his ear.

“Stir not a step—utter not a sound—or you are——”

Beck did not suffer her to proceed. With the violence rather of fear than of courage, he struck her to the ground; but she clung to him still; and, though rendered for the moment speechless by the suddenness of the blow, her eyes took an expression of unspeakable cruelty and fierceness. He struggled with all his might to shake her off; as he did so, she placed feebly her other hand upon the wrist of the lifted arm that had smitten her, and he felt a sharp pain, as if the nails had fastened into the flesh. This but exasperated him into new efforts. He extricated himself from her grasp, which relaxed, as her lips writhed into a smile of scorn and triumph, and, spurning her while she lay before the threshold, he opened the door, sprang forward, and escaped. No thought had he of tarrying in that House of Pelops, those human shambles, of denouncing Murder in its lair;—to fly, to reach his master, warn and shield him—that was the sole thought which crossed his confused, bewildered brain.

It might be from four to five minutes, that

Lucretia, half stunned, half senseless, lay upon those floors, for, besides the violence of her fall, the shock of the struggle, upon nerves weakened by crime so recent, and the agony of apprehension, occasioned by the imminent and unforeseen chance of detection, paralysed her wondrous vigour of mind and frame,—when Varney entered.

“The spasms have ceased,” he said, in hollow accents, before he saw the prostrate form at his very feet. But Varney’s step, Varney’s voice, had awakened Lucretia’s reason to consciousness and the sense of peril. Rising, though with effort, she related, hurriedly, what had passed.

“Fly—fly!” she gasped, as she concluded. “Fly—to detain, to secrete him somewhere, for the next few hours. Silence him but till then—I have done the rest!”—and her finger pointed to the fatal ring.

Varney waited for no further words; he hurried out, and made at once to the stables: his shrewdness conjectured that Beck would carry his tale elsewhere. The groom was already gone—(his fellows said) without a word, but towards the

lodge that led to the Southampton road. Varney sprang upon one of the horses that had been kept saddled since morning,

“I, too, must go towards Southampton—the poor young lady!—I must prepare your master—he is on his road back to us;” and the last word was scarce out of his lips, as the sparks flew from the flints under his horse’s hoofs, and he spurred from the yard.

As he rode at full speed through the park, the villain’s mind sped more rapidly than the animal he bestrode—sped from fear to hope—hope to assurance. Grant that the spy lived to tell his tale—incoherent, improbable as the tale would be—who would believe it? How easy to meet tale by tale! The man must own that he was secreted behind the tapestry;—wherefore, but, in the confusion that prevailed throughout the house, to rob? Detected by Madame Dalibard, he had coined this wretched fable. Examination of the dead would be courted; that examination betraying no signs of poison, would contradict, of itself, the charge. And the spy, too, could not live through the day—he bore Death with him as he

rode—he fed its force by his speed—and the effects of the venom itself would be those of frenzy. Tush! his tale, at best, would seem but the ravings of delirium. Still, it was well to track him where he went,—delay him, if possible; and Varney’s spurs plunged deep and deeper into the bleeding flanks: on desperately scoured the horse. He passed the lodge—he was on the road—a chaise and pair dashed by him—he heard not a voice exclaim “Varney!”—he saw not the wondering face of John Ardworth;—bending over the tossing mane—he was deaf, he was blind, to all without and around. A milestone glides by, another, and a third. Ha! his eyes can see now. The object of his chase is before him—he views distinctly, on the brow of yon hill, the horse and the rider, spurring fast, like himself. They descend the hill, horse and horseman, and are snatched from his sight. Up the steep strains the pursuer. He is at the summit. He sees the fugitive before him, almost within hearing. Beck has slackened his speed; he seems swaying to and fro in the saddle. Ho, ho! the barbed ring begins to work in his veins! Varney looks

round—not another soul is in sight—a deep wood skirts the road. Place and time seem to favour—Beck has reined in his horse—he bends low over the saddle, as if about to fall. Varney utters a half suppressed cry of triumph, shakes his reins, and spurs on—when, suddenly, (by the curve of the road, hid before) another chaise comes in sight, close where Beck had wearily halted.

The chaise stops—Varney pulls in and draws aside to the hedge-row! Some one within the vehicle is speaking to the fugitive! May it not be St. John himself? To his rage and his terror, he sees Beck painfully dismount from his horse—sees him totter to the door of the chaise—sees a servant leap from the box, and help him up the step—sees him enter. It *must* be Percival on his return! Percival, to whom he tells that story of horror! Varney's brute-like courage forsook him—his heart was appalled. In one of those panics so common with that boldness which is but animal, his sole thought became that of escape. He turned his horse's head to the fence—forced his way desperately through the barrier—made into the wood, and sate there,

cowering and listening, till in another minute he heard the wheels rattle on, and the horses gallop hard down the hill towards the park.

The autumn wind swept through the trees—it shook the branches of the lofty ash that overhung the murderer. What observer of nature knows not that peculiar sound which the ash gives forth in the blast—not the solemn groan of the oak—not the hollow murmur of the beech, but a shrill wail—a shriek, as of a human voice in sharp anguish. Varney shuddered, as if he had heard the death-cry of his victim! Through briars and thickets, torn by the thorns, bruised by the boughs,—he plunged deeper and deeper into the wood—gained at length the main path cut through it—found himself in a lane, and rode on, careless whither, till he had reached a small town, about ten miles from Laughton, where he resolved to wait till his nerves had recovered their tone, and he could more calmly calculate the chances of safety or—the gibbet!

CHAPTER XXVII.

LUCRETIA REGAINS HER SON.

IT seemed as if now, when danger became most imminent and present — that that very danger served to restore to Lucretia Dalibard all her faculties, which during the earlier day had been steeped in a kind of dreary stupor. The absolute necessity of playing out her execrable part with all suitable and consistent hypocrisy, braced her into iron. But the disguise she assumed was a supernatural effort—it stretched to cracking every fibre of the brain. It seemed almost to herself, as if, her object once gained, either life or consciousness could hold out no more !

A chaise stopped at the porch—two gentlemen

descended. On the first few words interchanged with the servant who appeared to their summons, the elder drew back, as if he felt his visit unseasonable, but the younger, after standing motionless for a moment, as with the shock of amaze and grief, pushed aside the servant, and rushed into the house. The elder paused irresolutely, and at length, taking out a card, inscribed "Mr. Walter Ardworth," said, "if Madame Dalibard can be spoken to for a moment, will you give her this card, and say that I will wait her summons at Southampton for the next few days; a line addressed to the post-office will reach me."

The footman hesitatingly stared at the card, and then invited Walter Ardworth into the hall, while he sent up the message. Not long had the visitor to wait, pacing the dark oak floors and gazing on the faded banners, before the servant reappeared—Madame Dalibard would see him. He followed his guide up the stairs. Entering the corridor, he saw his young companion, engaged in earnest conversation with a man whose air and dress bespoke the physician. He seemed to be urging some prayer—which the assenting nod of

the physician granted—the last opened a door, and the young man crept in after him.

Impressed with that awe which breathes through the house over which hover the wings of Death, Walter Ardworth felt his own step grow stealthy, and his breath come quick, as the servant opened the door of a room opposite to that which his companion had entered.

Grasping the arms of her chair with both hands, her eyes fixed eagerly on his face, Lucretia Dalibard awaited the welcome visitor.

Prepared as he had been for change, Walter was startled by the ghastly alteration in Lucretia's features, increased, as it was that moment, by all the emotions which raged within. He sank into the chair placed for him opposite Lucretia, and, clearing his throat, said, falteringly—

“ I grieve indeed, madam, that my visit, intended to bring but joy, should chance thus inopportunately. Let me trust, that the servant has exaggerated the state of your niece, and that you will have *two* to comfort your declining years—Susan's only child, too—poor Susan !”

“ Sir,” said Lucretia, in a hollow voice, “ these

moments are precious. You will judge of my anxiety to hear you, by receiving you at such a time. Sir—sir!—my son—my son!” and her eyes glanced to the door. “You have brought with you a companion,—does he wait without?—My son!”

“Madam, give me a moment’s patience. I will be brief, and compress what, in other moments, might be a long narrative, into a few sentences.”

Rapidly, then, Walter Ardworth passed over the details, unnecessary now to repeat to the reader; the injunctions of Braddell, the delivery of the child to the woman selected by his fellow-sectarian, (who, it seemed, by John Ardworth’s recent inquiries, was afterwards expelled the community, and who, there was reason to believe, had been the first seducer of the woman thus recommended.) No clue to the child’s parentage had been given to the woman, with the sum entrusted for his maintenance, which sum had perhaps been the main cause of her reckless progress to infamy and ruin. The narrator passed

lightly over the neglect and cruelty of the nurse, to her abandonment of the child when the money was exhausted. Fortunately, she had overlooked the coral round its neck. By that coral, and by the initials, V. B., which Ardworth had had the precaution to have burned into the child's wrist, the lost son had been discovered; the nurse herself, (found in the person of Martha Skeggs, Lucretia's own servant,) had been confronted with the woman to whom she gave the child, and recognised at once. Nor had it been difficult to obtain from her the confession which completed the evidence.

"In this discovery," concluded Ardworth, "the person I employed met your own agent, and the last links in the chain they traced together. But to *that* person,—to his zeal and intelligence,—you owe the happiness I trust to give you. He sympathized with me the more that he knew you personally, felt for your sorrows, and had a lingering belief that you supposed *him* to be the child you yearned for. Madam, thank my son for the restoration of your own!"

Without sound, Lucretia had listened to these

details, though her countenance changed fearfully as the narrator proceeded. But now she groaned aloud and in agony.

“Nay, madam,” said Ardworth, feelingly and in some surprise, “surely the discovery of your son should create gladder emotions. Though, indeed, you will be prepared to find that the poor youth so reared wants education and refinement, I have heard enough to convince me that his dispositions are good and his heart grateful. Judge of this yourself; he is in these walls—he is——”

“Abandoned by a harlot—reared by a beggar! My son!” interrupted Lucretia, in broken sentences. “Well, sir, have you discharged your task! Well have you replaced a mother!”

Before Ardworth could reply, loud and rapid steps were heard in the corridor, and a voice, cracked, indistinct, but vehement. The door was thrown open, and, half-supported by Captain Greville, half dragging him along—his features convulsed, whether by pain or passion,—the spy upon Lucretia’s secrets, the denouncer of her crime, tottered to the threshold. Pointing to where she sat with his long, lean arm, Beck

exclaimed—"Seize her! I 'cuse her, face to face, of the murder of her niece!—of—of—I told you, sir—I told you——"

"Madam," said Captain Greville, "you stand charged by this witness with the most terrible of human crimes. Pray God, that you may be innocent! Your niece, I rejoice to hear, yet lives! Pray God that her death be not traced to those kindred hands?"

Turning her eyes from one to the other with a wandering stare, Lucretia Dalibard remained silent. But there was still scorn on her lip, and defiance on her brow. At last she said, slowly, and to Ardworth—

"Where is my son? You say, he is within these walls—call him forth to protect his mother! Give me, at least, my son—my son!"

Her last words were drowned by a fresh burst of fury from her denouncer. In all the coarsest invective his education could supply—in all the hideous vulgarities of his untutored dialect—in that uncurbed licentiousness of tone, look, and manner which passion, once aroused, gives to the dregs and scum of the populace, Beck poured

forth his frightful charges—his frantic execrations. In vain Captain Greville strove to check him. In vain Walter Ardworth sought to draw him from the room. But while the poor wretch—maddening not more with the consciousness of the crime, than with the excitement of the poison in his blood—thus raved and stormed, a terrible suspicion crossed Walter Ardworth: mechanically—as his grasp was on the accuser's arm—he bared the sleeve, and on the wrist were the dark blue letters, burned into the skin, and witnessing his identity with the lost Vincent Braddell.

“Hold, hold!” he exclaimed then—“hold, unhappy man!—it is your mother whom you denounce!”

Lucretia sprang up erect—her eyes seemed starting from her head; she caught at the arm pointed towards her in wrath and menace—and there, amidst those letters that proclaimed her son, was the small puncture surrounded by a livid circle, that announced her victim. In the same instant she discovered her child in the man who was dooming her to the scaffold, and knew herself his murderess.

She dropped the arm, and sank back on the chair ; and, whether the poison had now reached to the vitals, or whether so unwonted a passion in so frail a frame, sufficed for the death-stroke, Beck himself, with a low suffocated cry, slid from the hand of Ardworth, and, tottering a step or so, the blood gushed from his mouth, over Lucretia's robe ;—his head drooped an instant, and falling, rested first upon her lap—then struck heavily upon the floor. The two men bent over him, and raised him in their arms—his eyes opened and closed—his throat rattled, and, as he fell back into their arms a corpse, a laugh rose close at hand—it rang through the walls, it was heard near and afar—above and below. Not an ear in that house that heard it not. In that laugh fled for ever, till the Judgment-day, from the blackened ruins of her lost soul, the reason of the murderess-mother.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LOTS VANISH WITHIN THE URN.

FAR other—oh, far other—the holy scene in the adjoining room. When that laugh rang through the ancient halls, Helen, in a sweet interval of pain, was murmuring comfort and smiling saint-like hope, on the strong son of earth, who knelt by her side. The ghastly merriment arrested her murmured words, and chilled her gentle smile.

“It is but your aunt’s burst of joy,” said young Ardworth: “my father has, doubtless, just restored her son to her arms!”

“How happy that thought has made me—you have given me your tidings so hurriedly—that I

could wish to learn more. But my time, I feel, is short. At least, may I see my aunt before I die—if not, tell her I prayed for her, while my lips pressed her forehead, last night—last night! Ah, indeed, the last!”

“Talk not thus, Helen, beloved!—talk not thus—your pain is over—you will recover—you will live yet.”

The physician approached, and held up his warning finger to the young man—“Curb yourself,” he whispered; “she must be kept calm.”

John Ardworth looked up—turned his face to Helen, and *smiled*.

The physician placed his hand on Ardworth’s shoulder, and motioned him to withdraw.

“Not yet—not quite yet,” said Helen—“one word more, and in private.”

The doctor moved reluctantly to the window.

“Cousin,” she then whispered, while a blush broke over her face, and gave to it the false glow of health, and virgin youth—“comfort Percival—you are strong and wise—watch over him. Perhaps in that watch we shall unite!”

So saying, she pressed his hand, and, her

eyes turning upwards—her thoughts passed into prayer.

But one human joy, at least, mournful if it was, Fate yet reserved to that serene death-bed—Percival returned before all was over. As if in one of those trances she had lately known, she foresaw and felt his approach for an hour before he arrived. And as he rushed into the room, she opened her arms, and said—"I have tarried but for this."

And Percival's hand was the last she clasped—and on Percival's face dwelt her last smile—and on that devoted faithful heart, scarcely less pure than her own, was breathed, without a pang, the young saint's parting sigh.

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Varney returned to the house at nightfall, and held a long conference with Greville and the elder Ardworth. He himself pressed for all possible investigation that an inquest could afford, and his representations, and the manner in which they were made, shook the acute soldier's belief in

Beck's monstrous tale. On the inquest, no facts were discovered that could attribute to Helen's death, any but a natural cause. No poison could be detected, no secondary evidence that could accuse, in the least, either Varney or Madame Dalibard of even administering the usual medicaments, appeared. Recognising on Beck the St. John livery, Captain Greville had (as we have seen) stopped his chaise, to inquire simply if Percival were at the Hall, and when, (causing him to enter the vehicle to explain the hideous import of the broken sentences by which the poor creature had replied,) Greville was thrilled by his revelations, the listener had been too much impressed with horror to question their truth. But the tale so incoherently related, so hurriedly received, succeeded by a death that betokened the disordered brain of the narrator, was now set incredulously aside. Surgical examination, indeed, discovered the membranes of the brain, and the brain itself, surcharged with blood, as in cases of delirium or feverish irritation in that organ; the slight puncture in the wrist, ascribed to the prick of some rusty nail, in one of a constitution thoroughly impaired and unsound, provoked no sus-

picion, even if connected with the primary causes of the fatal shock. The verdicts upon both the dead were therefore as Varney had not too sanguinely anticipated. If some doubts still remained in Greville's mind, he was not eager to express them. Why so needlessly add horror to Percival's despair, or, without results from the chastisement of justice, affix so foul a stain to the honoured family of St. John? As soon as the verdicts were given, Varney took formal leave of Greville, and removed from the house the form of Lucretia Dalibard :—the *form*, for the mind was gone—that teeming, restless, and fertile intellect, which had carried along the projects, with the preter-human energies, of the fiend, was hurled into night and chaos. Manacled and bound, for at times her paroxysms were terrible, and all partook of the destructive and murderous character, her faculties, when present, had betrayed, she was placed in the vehicle by the shrinking side of her accomplice. As the horses shot through the arch of the lodge, the death-knell for a twofold burial tolled.

Long before he arrived in London, Varney had got rid of his fearful companion. His chaise had



stopped at the iron gates of a large building, somewhat out of the main road, and the doors of the Madhouse closed on Lucretia Dalibard.

With the audacity of his temperament, and urged by the desperate state, both of his affairs and of his apprehensions, Varney, on reaching London, set himself to work to recover the sums insured upon Helen's life. Lucretia, for whose benefit the trust had been made, being incapacitated by her lunacy, the law awarded the benefit of such sums as she was entitled to, according to the disposition of any will she might have made during the possession of her intellects. By the help of Grabman, such a will in favour of Varney was easily forged and attested, and Varney proceeded to claim the debts due from the offices. But the first office he appealed to resisted the claim. There seemed strong legal doubts whether the parties comprehended by the Insurance had that interest in the life of Helen which the prudent scruples of the law demand—the strangeness of investing sums so large on the improbable chance of death in one so young and healthful—the sudden decease so soon following the insurances—some rumours picked up

in the neighbourhood of Laughton, the result of minute inquiries into the past career of Varney himself, and suspicious circumstances connected with his uncle's death, ingeniously hunted out and adroitly put together, all induced the legal advisers of the office to hazard a trial on the claim. Pressed by his debts—harassed night and day by the fear of the detection of his forgery on the Bank of England, Varney resolved to betake himself to France while the law-suit was carried on. He made his preparations accordingly, entrusted his case to Grabman, who, foiled of the reward on Beck's discovery, was promised remuneration from the recovery of the insurances,—when, as he was stepping into the vessel that was to conduct him to Boulogne, he was tapped rudely on the shoulder, and a determined voice said—
“Mr. Gabriel Varney, you are my prisoner!”

“For what—some paltry debt?” said Varney, haughtily.

“For forgery on the Bank of England!”

Varney's hand plunged into his vest. The officer seized it in time, and wrested the blade from his grasp. Once arrested for an offence it

was impossible to disprove, although the very smallest of which his conscience might charge him, Varney sank into the blackest despair. Though he had often boasted, not only to others, but to his own vain breast, of the easy courage with which, when life ceased to yield enjoyment, he could dismiss it by the act of his own will—though he had possessed himself of Lucretia's murderous ring, and death, if fearful, was therefore at his command, self-destruction was the last thought that occurred to him—that morbid excitability of fancy, which, whether in his art or in his deeds, had led him to strange delight in horror, now served but to haunt him with the images of death in those ghastliest shapes familiar to them who look only into the bottom of the charnel, and see but the rat and the worm, and the loathsome agencies of corruption. It was not the despair of conscience that seized him, it was the abject clinging to life;—not the remorse of the soul,—*that* still slept within him, too noble an agency for one so debased, but the gross physical terror. As the fear of the tiger once aroused is more paralyzing than that of the deer, propor-

tioned to the savageness of a disposition to which fear is a novelty, so the very boldness of Varney, coming only from the perfection of the nervous organization, and unsupported by one moral sentiment, once struck down, was corrupted into the vilest cowardice. With his audacity, his shrewdness forsook him. Advised by his lawyer to plead guilty, he obeyed, and the sentence of transportation for life gave him, at first, a feeling of reprieve; but when his imagination began to picture, in the darkness of his cell, all the true tortures of that penalty, not so much, perhaps to the uneducated peasant felon, inured to toil, and familiarized with coarse companionship, as to one pampered like himself by all soft and half womanly indulgences—the shaven hair—the convict's dress—the rigorous privation—the drudging toil;—the exile seemed as grim as the grave. In the dotage of faculties smitten into drivelling—he wrote to the Home Office, offering to disclose secrets connected with crimes that had hitherto escaped or baffled justice, on condition that his sentence might be repealed, or mitigated into the gentler forms of ordinary transportation.

No answer was returned to him—but when some acquaintances whom his art had made for him, and who, while grieving for his crime, saw in it some excuses, (ignorant of his feller deeds,) sought to intercede in his behalf; the reply was obvious, “Shall we let off the forger, because in his own letter he will confess himself an accomplice in murder?” Various particulars connected with his past career, brought to light by the indefatigable researches his demand on the Insurance Companies had provoked—strengthened against him the dispositions of the Home Office. Not one indulgence that could distinguish him from the most execrable ruffian, condemned to the same sentence, was conceded.

The idea of the gibbet lost all its horror. Here was a gibbet for every hour! No hope—no escape. Already that Future Doom which comprehends the ‘For ever’ opened upon him, black and fathomless. The hour-glass was broken up—the hand of the timepiece was arrested. The Beyond sketched before him, without limit, without goal—on into Annihilation or into Hell.

EPILOGUE TO PART THE SECOND

STAND, O Man ! upon the hill-top—in the stillness of the evening hour—and gaze, not with joyous, but with contented eyes, upon the beautiful world around thee ! See, where the mists, soft and dim, rise over the green meadows, through which the rivulet steals its way ! See where, broadest and stillest, the wave expands to the full smile of the setting sun—and the willow that trembles on the breeze—and the oak that stands firm in the storm, are reflected back, peaceful both, from the clear glass of the tides ! See, where, begirt by the gold of the harvests, and backed by the pomp of a thousand groves—the roofs of the town, bask, noiseless, in the calm glow of the sky. Not a sound from those

abodes floats in discord to thine ear,—only from the church-tower, soaring high above the rest, perhaps, faintly heard through the stillness, swells the note of the holy bell. Along the mead low-skims the swallow—on the wave, the silver circlet, breaking into spray, shows the sport of the fish. See, the Earth, how serene, though all eloquent of activity and life! See the Heavens, how benign, though dark clouds, by yon mountain, blend the purple with the gold! Gaze contented, for Good is around thee—not joyous, for Evil is the shadow of Good! Let thy soul pierce through the veil of the senses, and thy sight plunge deeper than the surface which gives delight to thine eye. Below the glass of that river, the pike darts on his prey; the circle in the wave, the soft splash amongst the reeds, are but signs of Destroyer and of Victim. In the ivy round the oak by the margin, the owl hungers for the night, which shall give its beak and its talons living food for its young; and the spray of the willow trembles with the wing of the red-breast, whose bright eye sees the worm on the sod. Canst thou count too, O Man! all the cares—all the sins—that those noiseless roof-tops conceal?

With every curl of that smoke to the sky, a human thought soars as dark, a human hope melts as briefly. And the bell from the church-tower, that to thy ear gives but music, perhaps knolls for the dead. The swallow but chases the moth, and the cloud that deepens the glory of the heaven, and the sweet shadows on the earth, nurses but the thunder that shall rend the grove, and the storm that shall devastate the harvests. Not with fear, not with doubt, recognise, O Mortal, the presence of Evil in the world.* Hush thy heart in the humbleness of awe, that its mirror may reflect as serenely the shadow as the light. Vainly, for its moral, dost thou gaze on the landscape, if thy soul puts no check on the dull delight of the senses. Two wings only raise thee to the summit of Truth—where the Cherub shall comfort the sorrow, where the Seraph shall enlighten the joy. Dark

* Not, indeed, that the evil here narrated is the *ordinary* evil of the world. The lesson it inculcates would be lost, if so construed; but that the mystery of evil, whatever its degree, only increases the necessity of faith in the vindication of the contrivance which requires infinity for its range, and eternity for its consummation. It is in the existence of evil that man finds his duties, and his soul its progress.

as ebon, spreads the one wing, white as snow gleams the other—mournful as thy *reason* when it descends into the deep—exulting as thy *faith* when it springs to the day-star.

In the churchyard at Laughton, there is a tomb apart from the rest. It stands between the church and the yew tree; and in the small enclosure, within the fence which surrounds it, low shrubs, and some flowers, have been trained to grow. There, once in every year, since Helen died, comes a pilgrim from the Great City;—there, the hard man pauses from his toil;—there, Ambition forgets its dreams;—there, as in one arch-sabbath, a labouring and earnest soul returns to its childhood, and communes through death with God;—and there, not yearly, but often—(oh, how often!)—nor more rarely as time fleets on, and the cares of man deepen around him—comes the gentler and tenderer mourner. Upon those two natures, so opposite, yet so united in love and sorrow for the lost, the influence of Helen's memory remains still—stronger, more enduring, perhaps, than the influence of the living Helen could have been.

John Ardworth has not paused in his career,

nor belied the promise of his youth. Though, partly by his own exertions, partly by his second marriage with the daughter of the French merchant, (through whose agency he had corresponded with Fielden,) the elder Ardworth had realized a moderate fortune, it but sufficed for his own wants, and for the children of his later nuptials, upon whom the bulk of it was settled. Hence, happily perhaps for himself and others, the easy circumstances of his father allowed to John Ardworth no exemption from labour. His success in the single episode from active life to literature, did not intoxicate or mislead him. He knew that his real element was not in the field of letters, but in the world of men. Not undervaluing the noble destinies of the Author, he felt that those destinies, if realized to the utmost, demanded powers other than his own;—and that man is only true to his genius when that genius is at home in its career. He would not renounce for a brief celebrity distant and solid fame. He continued for a few years in patience and privation, and confident self-reliance, to drudge on, till the occupation for

the intellect fed by restraint, and the learning accumulated by study, came and found the whole man developed and prepared. Then, he rose rapidly from step to step—then, still retaining his high enthusiasm, he enlarged his sphere of action from the cold practice of law, into those vast social improvements which law, rightly regarded, should lead, and vivify, and create. Then, and long before the twenty years he had imposed on his probation had expired, he gazed again upon the senate and the abbey, and saw the doors of the one open to his resolute tread, and anticipated the glorious sepulchre, heart and brain should win him in the other.

But often, when he felt the harshness of experience creep over him—when that cold scepticism, which experience of men and professional distrust tend to inspire—made the old generous poetry of ambition fade into that egotism which is the prose of action, the image of that fair child, with whom all his earliest aspirations had been linked—from whose simple lips, noble and lovely thoughts had flowed—as bright waters from untroubled wells—hovered over him ; and the very

air grew warmer, as if with a living breath. This image—the holy associations that were blent with it—the solemn regrets it bequeathed—seemed to dwell for ever beside him, like the visible spirit of his own youth—banishing with its pure eyes the colder and harder shapes in which ideas clothe themselves, as we advance in years: And in the noble thought, and the lofty deed, it smiled upon him with a sister's approving joy.

Far longer was it before Percival St. John could return to the duties of real life. Objectless, and hopeless, he fled from his native land—as if he could fly himself! But gradually over him, too, the memory of Helen extended and strengthened its true and predestined influence. He returned to England; and, in the fulfilment of human duties, felt his best union with an immortal soul. His mother is still spared to him—to soothe and comfort; Greville long survived—to encourage and to guide. Those vague indications of talent, and those desultory promises of distinction, which his boyhood had known, have as yet deepened only into one channel—that of thoughtful, beneficent, goodness. As Ardworth,

in those vast aims which advance an age, or exalt a race, so Percival, in the narrower, but more intense circle of individual sympathy and charitable purpose, has found his fittest sphere—the one fulfilling the ends of intellect—the other of the heart. Godlike the destiny to both, and each in his sphere must mingle ; for the intellect runs to evil without the heart guide it, and the heart ever has a genius of its own, when it loves and pities. The centre of that noiseless good, which wealth can diffuse around it, Percival St. John is beloved as a child, and yet revered as a sage: And from that circle, as from a glory, he sees with the eyes of his soul one angel's happy, applauding face ! Oh, what a temple of the whole universe is made by one tomb which is duly honoured !

The closest brotherhood between Percival and Ardworth exists. In their rare meetings they warm to each other, as members of the same house, meeting upon the same hearth. Neither, as yet, has formed new ties : but Percival, at least, is still young, nor Ardworth too old to hope for happiness at the altar ; yet neither has complained that his lot is lonely, and his

affections void. For him who aspires and for him who loves, the world may have sorrows, but never solitude.

On the minor personages involved in this history, there is little need to dwell. We know that, whatever the good pastor's grief at the death of Helen, he but considered that a new joy was added to the future heaven, in the grief entailed on earth. In his simple piety he was armed in the only sublime philosophy:—the rainbow was reflected in the cloud, 'and the token of the shower was but the promise of deliverance from the deluge.'*

We may feel satisfied that the Mivers' will go on much the same while trade enriches without refining, and while, nevertheless, right feelings in the common paths of duty may unite charitable emotions with graceless language.

We may rest assured that the poor widow who had reared the lost son of Lucretia received from the bounty of Percival all that could comfort her for his death.

We have no need to track the dull crimes of

* Macauley.

Martha, or the quick, cunning vices of Grabman to their inevitable goals, in the hospital or the prison, the dunghill or the gibbet.

Of the elder Ardworth our parting notice may be less brief. We first saw him in sanguine and generous youth, with higher principles and clearer insight into honour than William Mainwaring. We have seen him next a spendthrift and a fugitive, his principles debased, and his honour dimmed. He presents to us no uncommon example of the corruption engendered by that vulgar self-indulgence which mortgages the morrow for the pleasures of to-day. No Deity presides where Prudence is absent. Man, a world in himself, requires for the development of his faculties, patience; and for the balance of his actions, order. Even where he had deemed himself most oppressively made the martyr—viz., in the profession of mere political opinions, Walter Ardworth had but followed out into theory the restless, uncalculating impatience, which had brought adversity on his manhood, and, despite his constitutional cheerfulness, shadowed his age with remorse. The death of the child committed to his charge, long, (per-

haps to the last,) embittered his pride in the son, whom, without merit of his own, Providence had spared to a brighter fate: But for the faults which had banished him his country, and the habits which had seared his sense of duty, could that child have been so abandoned, and have so perished?

It remains only to cast our glance over the punishments which befel the sensual villany of Varney,—the intellectual corruption of his fell stepmother.

These two persons had made a very trade of those crimes to which man's law awards death. They had said in their hearts that they would dare the crime, but elude the penalty. By wonderful subtlety, craft, and dexterity, which reduced guilt to a science, they had compassed their end. Providence seemed, as in disdain of the vulgar instruments of common retribution, to concede to them that which they had schemed for,—escape from the rope and gibbet. Varney, saved from detection of his darker and more inexpiable crimes, punished only for the least one—retained what had seemed to him the master boon

—life! Safer still from the law, no mortal eye had plumbed the profound night of Lucretia's awful guilt. Murderess of husband, and niece, and son, the blinded law bade her go, unscathed, unsuspected. Direct as from Heaven, without a cloud, fell the thunderbolt. Is the life they have saved worth the prizing? Doth the chalice, unspilt on the ground, not return to the hand? Is the sudden pang of the hangman more fearful than the doom which they breathe and bear? Look, and judge!

Behold, that dark ship on the waters! Its burthens are not of Ormus and Tyre. No goodly merchandize doth it waft over the wave, no blessing cleaves to its sails; freighted with terror and with guilt, with remorse and despair, or more ghastly than either, the sullen apathy of souls hardened into stone, it carries the dregs and offal of the old world to populate the new. On a bench in that ship, sit side by side two men, companions assigned to each other. Pale, abject, cowering, all the bravery rent from his garb, all the gay insolence vanished from his brow—can that hollow-eyed, haggard wretch, be the same

man whose senses opened on every joy, whose nerves mocked at every peril? But beside him, with a grin of vile glee on his features, all muscle and brawn in the form, all malice, at once spiteful and dull, in the heavy eye, sits his fit comrade—the Grave-stealer! At the first glance each had recognised each, and the prophecy and the vision rushed back upon the daintier convict. If he seek to escape from him, the grave-stealer claims him as a prey, he threatens him with his eye as a slave, he kicks him with his hoof as they sit, and laughs at the writhing of the pain. Carry on your gaze from the ship:—hear the cry from the mast-head—see the land arise from the waste! A land without hope! At first, despite the rigour of the Home Office, the education and intelligence of Varney have their price—the sole crime for which he is convicted is not of the darkest. He escapes from that hideous comrade, he can teach as a schoolmaster;—let his brain work, not his hands! But the most irredeemable of convicts are ever those of nurture, and birth, and culture, better than the ruffian-rest. You may enlighten the clod, but the meteor still must feed

on the marsh: And the pride, and the vanity, work where the crime itself seems to lose its occasion. Ever avid, ever grasping, he falls step by step in the foul sink, and the colony sees in Gabriel Varney its most pestilent rogue; Arch-convict amidst convicts, doubly lost amongst the damned; they banish him to the sternest of the penal settlements—they send him forth with the vilest to break stones upon the roads. Shrivelled, and bowed, and old, prematurely—see that sharp face peering forth amongst that gang, scarcely human,—see him cringe to the lash of the scornful overseer—see the pairs chained together, night and day! Ho, ho! his comrade hath found him again, the Artist and the Grave-stealer leashed together! Conceive that fancy, so nurtured by habit—those tastes, so womanized by indulgence—the one suggesting the very horrors that are not, the other revolting at all toil as a torture.

But intellect not all gone, though hourly dying heavily down to the level of the brute, yet schemes for delivery and escape. Let the plot ripen, and the heart bound: break his chain—set him free—send him forth to the wilderness! Hark, the

whoop of the wild men ! See those things that ape our species dance and gibber round the famishing hunted wretch. Hark how he shrieks at the torture ! How they tear, and they pinch, and they burn, and they rend him ! They too spare his life—it is charmed !—A Caliban amidst Calibans, they heap him with their burthens, and feed him on their offal. Let him live ; he loved life for himself, he has cheated the gibbet,—LET HIM LIVE ! Let him watch, let him once more escape ; all naked and mangled, let him wander back to the huts of his gang. Lo ! where he kneels, the foul tears streaming down, and cries aloud,—“ I have broken all your laws, I will tell you all my crimes ; I ask but one sentence—hang me up—let me die !” And from the gang groan many voices—“ Hang us up—let us die !” The overseer turns on his heel, and Gabriel Varney again is chained to the laughing Grave-stealer.

You enter those gates so jealously guarded—you pass, with a quick beat of the heart, by those groupés on the lawn, though they are harmless ;—you follow your guide through those passages ;

where the open doors will permit, you see the emperor brandish his sceptre of straw—hear the speculator counting his millions — sigh, where the maiden sits smiling, the return of her shipwrecked lover—or gravely shake the head and hurry on, where the fanatic raves his Apocalypse, and reigns in judgment on the world;—you pass by strong grates into corridors gloomier and more remote. Nearer and nearer, you hear the yell, and the oath and blaspheming curse—you are in the heart of the Mad-house, where they chain those at once cureless and dangerous—who have but sense enough left them to smite, and to throttle, and to murder. Your guide opens that door, massive as a wall, you see (as we, who narrate, have seen her) Lucretia Dalibard:—a grisly, squalid, ferocious mockery of a human being—more appalling and more fallen, than Dante ever fabled in his spectres, than Swift ever scoffed in his Ya-hoos!—Only where all other feature seems to have lost its stamp of humanity, still burns with unquenchable fever—the red devouring eye. That eye never seems to sleep, or, in sleep, the lid never closes over it. As you shrink

from its light, it seems to you as if the mind that had lost coherence and harmony, still retained latent and incommunicable *consciousness* as its curse. For days, for weeks—that awful maniac will preserve obstinate, unbroken silence; but, as the eye never closes, so the hands never rest—they open and grasp as if at some palpable object on which they close, vice-like, as a bird's talons on its prey—sometimes they wander over that brow, where the furrows seem torn as the thunder scars, as if to wipe from it a stain, or charm from it a pang—sometimes they gather up the hem of that sordid robe, and seem, for hours together, striving to rub from it a soil. Then, out from prolonged silence, without cause or warning, will ring, peal after peal (till the frame, exhausted with the effort, sinks senseless into stupor) the frightful laugh. But speech, intelligible and coherent, those lips rarely yield.

There are times, indeed, when the attendants are persuaded that her mind in part returns to her; and those times, experience has taught them to watch with peculiar caution. The crisis evinces itself by a change in the manner—by a quick ap-

prehension of all that is said—by a straining anxious look at the dismal walls—by a soft fawning docility—by murmured complaints of the chains that fetter—and (though, as we have said, but very rarely,) by prayers, that seem rational, for greater ease and freedom.

In the earlier time of her dread captivity, perhaps, when it was believed at the asylum that she was a patient of condition, with friends who cared for her state, and would liberally reward her cure,—they, in those moments, relaxed her confinement, and sought the gentler remedies their art employs ; but then invariably, and, it was said, with a cunning that surpassed all the proverbial astuteness of the mad, she turned this indulgence to the most deadly uses—she crept to the pallet of some adjacent sufferer weaker than herself, and the shrieks that brought the attendants into the cell, scarcely saved the intended victim from her hands. It seemed, in those imperfectly lucid intervals, as if the reason only returned to guide her to destroy — only to animate the broken mechanism into the beast of prey.

Years have now passed since her entrance

within those walls. He who placed her there never had returned—he had given a false name—no clue to him was obtained—the gold he had left was but the quarter's pay. When Varney had been first apprehended, John Ardworth, then at Laughton, vainly striving to comfort Percival, who was almost insensible to the external world, wrote to his father to seek the forger in prison—to question him as to Madame Dalibard; but Varney was then so apprehensive that, even if still insane, her very ravings might betray his share in her crimes, or still more, if she recovered, that the remembrance of her son's murder would awaken the repentance and the confession of crushed despair, that the wretch had judged it wiser to say that his accomplice was no more—that her insanity had already terminated in death. Compelled to abandon his claim on the Insurance Companies, the place of her confinement (which otherwise such litigation would have made known) continued a secret locked in his own breast. Egotist to the last, she was henceforth dead to him,—why not to the world? The elder Ardworth, without pressing for the details that

might have occurred to his more penetrating son, implicitly believed the story ; and the shock Lucretia had undergone rendered it sufficiently probable to be received by John without suspicion. Thus, though, then, but slight inquiry might have sufficed to track her—that inquiry was withheld—thus the partner of her crimes had cut off her sole resource, in the compassion of her unconscious kindred ;—thus the gates of the living world were shut to her evermore. Still, in a kind of compassion, or as an object of experiment—as a subject to be dealt with unscrupulously in that living dissection-hall—her grim gaolers did not grudge her an asylum. But, year after year, the attendance was more slovenly—the treatment more harsh ; and strange to say, while the features were scarcely recognisable—while the form underwent all the change which the shape suffers when mind deserts it, that prodigious vitality which belonged to the temperament still survived. No signs of decay are yet visible. Death, as if spurning the carcass, stands inexorably afar off. Baffler of man's law, *thou*, too, hast escaped with life ! Not for thee is the sen-

tence, "Blood for blood!" Thou livest—thou mayst pass the extremest boundaries of age. Live on, to wipe the kiss from thy brow, and the blood from thy robe!—LIVE ON!

Not for the coarse object of creating an idle terror—not for the shock upon the nerves and the thrill of the grosser interest which the narrative of crime creates, has this book been compiled from the facts and materials afforded to the author. When the great German poet describes, in not the least noble of his lyrics, the sudden apparition of some 'Monster Fate' in the circles of careless Joy, he assigns to him who teaches the world through parable or song, the right to invoke the spectre. It is well to be awakened at times from the easy common-place that surrounds our habitual life—to cast broad, and steady, and patient light on the darker secrets of the heart; on the vaults and caverns of the social state, over which we build the market-place and the palace. We recover from the dread, and the awe, and the half-incredulous wonder, to set closer watch upon our inner and hidden selves. In him who cultivates only the reason, and suffers the heart and

the spirit to lie waste and dead, who schemes, and constructs, and revolves round the axle of self, unwarmed by the affections, unpoised by the attraction of right,—lies the germ Fate might ripen into the guilt of Olivier Dalibard. Let him who but lives through the senses, spreads the wings of the fancy in the gaudy glare of enjoyment corrupted, avid to seize, and impatient to toil, whose faculties are curbed but to the range of physical perception, whose very courage is but the strength of the nerves, who developes but the animal as he stifles the man,—let him gaze on the villany of Varney, and startle to see some magnified shadow of himself thrown dimly on the glass! Let those who, with powers to command and passions to wing the powers, would sweep without scruple from the aim to the end—who, trampling beneath their footprint of iron the humanities that bloom up in their path—would march to success, with the proud stride of the destroyer, hear, in the laugh of yon maniac murderess, the glee of the fiend they have wooed to their own souls! Guard well

O Heir of Eternity, the portal of sin—the *thought!*
From the thought to the deed, the subtler thy
brain, and the bolder thy courage, the briefer and
straighter is the way. Dost thou count on a
death for the accession to gold, or the crown to a
passion?—thy thought is at war with a life, though
thy hand may shrink back from its murder. Read
these pages in disdain of self-commune—they
shall revolt thee, not instruct; read them, look-
ing steadfastly within, and how humble soever the
art of the narrator, the facts he narrates, like all
history, shall teach by example. Every human
Act, good or ill, is an Angel to guide or to warn;*
and the deeds of the worst have messages from
Heaven to the listening hearts of the best.
Amidst the glens in the Apennine,—in the lone
wastes of Calabria, the sign of the Cross marks
the spot, where a deed of violence has been done;
on all that pass by the road, the symbol has
varying effect; sometimes it startles the con-
science, sometimes it invokes the devotion; the

* Our Acts our Angels are—or good or ill;
The fatal shadows that walk by us still.

FLETCHER.

robber drops the blade, the priest counts the rosary. So is it with the record of crime: and in the witness of Guilt, Man is thrilled with the whisper of Religion.

THE END.

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